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UNIVERSALISM: BIBLICAL CHALLENGES WITH SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE CHURCH OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

**Edited by
Augustine Mulloor**

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jeevadhara

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Universalism: Biblical Challenges with some Reflections on the Church of Twenty-first Century

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Editorial

God is the Boundless, the Infinite. God cannot create boundaries because that would be against God's own nature. When God created the heaven and the earth boundaries were not determined but only identities so that no boundary violation was possible, but only self transcendence through the acceptance of identities, leading to communion and universal unity with diversity. In calling, electing, promising, making the covenant - giving the law God intended to manifest God's own frontierlessness and universality. In Jesus the perfect revelation of that "boundlessness" took historical, visible, tangible and audible form. The Church is sent to live and testify to this universalism.

Then who made the boundaries and frontiers that exist today? We have succumbed to the temptation of creating boundaries and we have taught each other to violate the boundaries, we have established the unjust right to encroach upon the "sacred mystery" of the other, effecting constant disharmony, disunity and discomfort. Has not the Church which is called to be the sign of universalism, tragically yielded to particularism, claiming herself to be the "owner of the land" and thus starkly contradicting her own nature and mission? The challenge is to admit the ambiguity and paradoxicality, to risk to be radical especially in our multi-religious, pluri-cultural context, orienting strongly towards the original model, Jesus Christ.

In this Scripture issue of *Jeevadhara* we have tried to identify the challenges of universalism emerging from biblical traditions. Prepared by Bible scholars to whom I am sincerely grateful, this issue captures the different aspects of universalism in the Bible, starting with the Pentateuchal traditions; moving to prophetic realms, reaching the evangelical visions of Matthew, Luke and John and culminating in the didactic traditions of Paul.

The authentic universalistic attitudes can become real in our lives - only if we are willing to delve into the deep waters until we touch the deepest base, who is God, the boundless and the infinite. A movement from the rational to the mystical is the only way to universalism, that will be free from both vertical discriminations and horizontal separations.

The last article by the General Editor, by its very title, shows the urgency of the questions proposed and discussed.. The Church as at present with its retreating from Vatican II has to undergo a real *kenosis* in, order to be of effective service to the Kingdom of God. If it fails it has no reason for or justification of its existence. Pope John Paul II last month made a historic act of confession of all past sins of Christians and asked pardon of God and the world for all those wrongs. We should all be thankful to the Pope for his humble and sincere confession. But at the same time we also believe that no amount of such confession will be of any avail if it does not follow a radical transformation of the Church, especially of its present power structures. Jesus wants all authority in the Church 'to serve and not to rule'. The Church has to return to Jesus Christ's ordination: Those who want to be first among you must be your slave. It will be no less than death if the Church were to be so radically transformed.

Augustine Mulloor Editor

Election of Israel Versus Universalism

Pascal Korothe

Election is a basic concept of biblical revelation. Then, is not the election of Israel a contradiction to universalism which too is an important theme in the Bible? Or is the election rather a medium of the universalism? The article discusses this question on the basis of the important texts from the Pentateuch and brings to focus the universalist aspects of election itself.

Election is a term used in the biblical and theological literature to refer to the idea and the fact that God chooses a people or individuals to belong to Him in a unique way. In the Old Testament, the object of God's choice is the people of Israel as a whole and groups as well as individual persons within this people. Election is a fundamental reality of biblical revelation. It is a significant event in the history of salvation. A basic statement of this truth about the election of Israel can be found in Deut 7:6, "For you are a people consecrated to Yahweh your God; of all the peoples on earth, you have been chosen by Yahweh your God to be his own people." A more specific affirmation with details of Israel's obligations is given in Deut 26:17-18:

Today you have obtained this declaration from Yahweh: that he will be your God, but only if you follow his ways, keep his statutes, his commandments, his customs and listen to his voice. And today Yahweh has obtained this declaration from you: that you will be his own people - as he has said - but only if you keep all his commandments; then for praise and renown and honour, he will raise you higher than every other nation he has made, and you will be a people consecrated to Yahweh, as he has promised.

These texts bring out the special relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel. The election of Israel affirmed in the cited texts and found explicitly or implicitly confirmed in many texts of the books of the Bible define the very identity of Israel - the people of God. In the New Testament the concept of election is intimately

linked with the church, as the new people of God, as a whole and groups and individuals within the church.

In the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament election is a concept, which is implicit in all the statements about the vocation and mission of the people of God - Israel and Church and groups or individuals within them. In this article, the focus is on the election of Israel. We make an attempt in this study to investigate the meaning of the election of Israel juxtaposing Israel with the nations which are 'not elected'. What is the nature of the election of Israel? What place other notions have in the framework of the special relationship between Yahweh and Israel? Is it justified to maintain an exclusivist vision and attitude in life on the basis of this election from the part of the 'chosen' people? Is there a universalistic dimension for the biblical election? These are some questions necessarily to be raised at the beginning of this study.

This is a relevant topic for study because there are pressing issues in our present day life, which challenge the very claim of special election. The church has the faith conviction that it is chosen: it has a unique vocation and specific mission. How to understand this conviction and claim in the context of the present-day world where the religious consciousness of various peoples professing their faith in one or other world-religion or tribal religion is better awakened. In India we have witnessed the tension which occurs when different religious traditions interact, especially in the context of the recently concluded papal visit to India.¹ If the church makes claim that it is privileged to have divine election the other religions are not willing to recognize such a privileged position of the church. The world invites the church as a dialogue partner.² Dialogue is the demand of the time and the people who have the conviction of a unique divine

1. "The first lesson of the papal visit is that we live in a world where our presence is noticed. The centuries of ghetto Christian life is over". "Editorial", *Vidyajyothi Journal of Theological Reflection* 63 (1999) 877-880.

2. The tension experienced in the recently concluded Synod of Asia and in the proposed FABC Plenary meeting between the conviction of election leading to exclusivist and ghetto mentality is more open dialogue is highlighted by Edmund Chia, "The 'Absence of Jesus' in the VIIth FABC Plenary Assembly", *Vidyajyothi Journal of Theological Reflection* 63 (1999) 892-899. Cf. Also the insightful article by Joseph Pathrapankal, "Biblical Interpretation and Inter-religious Dialogue", *Word and Worship* 1-3 (1999) 26-38.

election must reciprocate this demand. The relevance of the study on this topic on election and universalism is evident. In this article investigation is limited to the Pentateuchal and Historical sources of the Old Testament, focussing on the election of Israel in its universalistic thrust.

1. Recent Trends in the Study of Election of Israel

Election of Israel is one of the biblical topics studied in depth in recent years.³ In 1928, K.Galling wrote a monograph "Die Erwählungstraditionen Israels" in which he suggested that the Old Testament has two traditions of God's election of Israel, one in the time of Abraham and the other in the time of Moses and the Mosaic tradition is older.⁴ Sometime later J.M.P. Smith opined that the faith of Israel in her election rested on a natural pride of the nation and race and in the faith in Yahweh, whom she represented among the nations.⁵ Walther Eichrodt was very much engrossed in the covenant theme but considered the election and covenant as intrinsically related realities. He held that even where the word election was not used the people and the prophets understood that Israel had a special position among the nations.⁶ Regarding the quality of this divine election Eichrodt says that in the Old Testament, the divine love is absolutely free and unconditional in its choices; it is directed to one man out of thousands and lays hold on him with jealous exclusiveness despite all his deficiencies.⁷ In 1950 H.H.Rowley acknowledged two election traditions in the Old Testament but defended the early choice of Abraham. Israel was elected in Abraham, but his election was revealed through Moses.⁸ Another important scholar who dealt with

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3. A rather detailed survey can be found in the article. "I will be your God; you shall be my people. Election and Covenant: in Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993, 122-163.
 4. K.Gallings, "Die Erwählungstraditionen Israels", *BZAW* 8 (1928).
 5. Cf J.M.P. Smith, "The Chosen People", *ASJL* 45 (1929) 73-82.
 6. Cf Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament I*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, 169.
 7. Cf Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament I*, 286.
 8. Cf H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1950, 30-31.

this theme of election was G.E. Wright who saw the election of Israel as one of the chief clues for understanding Israel and the faith of the Old Testament, Wright insisted that the theme of election is more primary than covenant.⁹

Wheeler Robinson said that it is difficult to see how any revealed religion can dispense with the doctrine of election, for it is the mandate to a minority to persist in their purpose as the people of God. The particularism it involves belongs to every high mission and is no mark of provincialism in religion. The doctrine of election opens into the whole development of Israelite and Jewish religion and can be taken as the most comprehensive principle of unity in it. The doctrine of election should not be subordinated to the covenant theme.¹⁰ In 1953 John Bright emphasized the importance of the doctrine of election in the Old Testament. History of election is traced back to Abraham but it was in Exodus event that Israel saw her real beginning as a people.¹¹ Among the complex of truths in the Old Testament, election stands out. Belief in Israel's election pervades the whole of the Old Testament. Every where in the Old Testament it is either tacitly assumed or confidently asserted that Yahweh has called Israel out of all nations of the earth to be his chosen people.¹² In the same year Th.C.Vriezen published a monograph on election in the Old Testament in which he limited the full meaning of election to the Hebrew term *bahar* "choose". Vriezen arrived at a narrow meaning of election secondary to covenant. He saw Israel's election by God as a source of tension and paradox in the Old Testament. On the one hand God chose Israel and warned her not to mingle with other nations. On the other hand, God chose Israel for service to Him and

9. Cf. G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment*, London: SCM, 1950, 47. Also *God who Acts*, London: SCM, 1952, 32 no. 1. However near the end of his life Wright modified his view regarding the relationship of election and covenant, suggesting that covenant is central.

10. Cf. Wheeler H. Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946, 153.

11. Cf. John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*. Nashville: Abingdon - Cokesberry, 1953, 27.

12. Cf. John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1967, 132.

to other nations.¹³ For Edmund Jacob election is one of the central realities of the Old Testament: it is the initial act by which Yahweh comes into relation with his people and the permanent reality, which assumed the constancy of that bond. Every intervention of God in history is an election.¹⁴

For von Rad, the later belief in Israel's election is already implicit in the pre-Yahwistic cult of the ancestors of Israel. The concept of election is used first on a broad theological basis by Deuteronomy at a later date, but the belief that Yahweh took Israel as his own particular people is very old. Von Rad held that the concept of the election of Israel dissolved before the time of the chronicler¹⁵. Walther Zimmerli expresses a similar view; for him even though the theology of election was formulated later the account of the call of Abraham in Gen 12:1-4 contains the roots of Israel's life as the people of God.¹⁶ According to Ronald Clements the theology of election is at the basis of the peoplehood of Israel. As mentioned above Deut 7:6-8 is the classic passage of this theology of election. Even though the form of this theology is Deuteronomic, the main ideas of the theology of election are very much older.¹⁷ In recent times, though there is a diminishing stress on the doctrine of election in the Old Testament theologies - Samuel Terrien and Claus Westermann can be cited to show this trend¹⁸ - election is an all-important topic for Christoph Barth. The election of the patriarchs is a basic article in the Israel's creed. But

13. Cf. Th. C. Vriezen, *Die Erwählung Israels*. Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1953, 35, 109. Vriezen argues for the universalistic aspect of election in *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, Newton, MA; Chas. T. Brassford, 1970, 132.

14. Cf. Edmund Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*. New York: Harper and Row, 1958, 201, 205.

15. Cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I*. New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 7, 178, 353.

16. Cf. Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1978, 27, 44, 47.

17. Cf. Ronald Clements, *Old Testament Theology: A French Approach*., Atlanta: John Knox, 1978, 88, 95.

18. Cf. Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*. San Francisco: Harper, 1978, 124. Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1982, 41-42.

the topic of the election of the patriarchs is complementary to the election of the people of Israel at Exodus, the Sinaitic covenant and the gift of the land. Israel did not become a nation until it came out of Egypt (Ezek 20:5-6; Hos 11: 1; 12:9; 13:4; Amos 3:1).¹⁹

This brief and cursory look into the scholarly studies on the theme of election shows the importance of the theme of election in the Old Testament theological reflection. Though there is no unanimity regarding the moment of the initial experience of election by the people of Israel, whether it is the patriarchal call or the Mosaic covenant, the fact of election is a basis, for the peoplehood of Israel. This fact of election in Abraham and Moses is older than the theology of election in the Yahwist and Deuteronomist.²⁰

2. Terminological Consideration

From what has been mentioned above it is clear that election and covenant are two realities intrinsically and inseparably related. Covenant presupposes election: election culminates in covenant. In order to look into the exclusivistic or universalistic aspects of the election of Israel we have to look into the sources, which deal with the election and covenant. As a first step we mention briefly the terminology employed in the Old Testament to refer to the complex concept of election. The word *bahar* "choose" is used of God's choosing the patriarchs (Neh 9:7); Israel (Deut 4:37; 7:7-8; 10:15; 14:2; Ps 105:43; Is 44:1-2; Ezek 20:5); David (2 Sam 6:21; 1 Kings 8:16; Ps 78:70; Ps 89:3); the place of worship (Deut 12:18,26; 14:25; 15:20; 16:7,16; 17:8,10; 18:6; 31:11; Josh 9:27; Ps 132:13); the priests (Num 16:5,7; 17:5; Hab 17:20; Deut 18:5; 1 Sam 2:27-28). Other Hebrew terms used in the Old Testament to express the fact of election are *qara'* (in Is 51:2 referring to Abraham: compare Gen 12:1-3; in Sam 3:4-21 referring to Samuel); *yada'* "know" (in Gen 18:19 and Amos 3:2 to mean "to choose" or "to elect"); *badal* "separate" or "set apart" (in the sense of God separating Israel from the nations refers to election in Lev 20:24; Num 8:14; 16:9; Deut 10:8); *masa'* "found" (is used in the sense of election in Deut 32:10; Ps 89:21; Hos 9: 10); *laqah* "take" (meaning election in Ex 6:7 and Deut 4:34).²¹

19. Cf. Christoph Barth, *God with us*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, 4 1.

20. Cf. Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology*, 126.

21. Cf. Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology*, 132-133.

The most important word is *bahar*. The use of *bahar* in the sense of God choosing Israel does not occur before Deuteronomy.²² There is no Hebrew noun for 'election' in the Old Testament.²³

Though the word *bahar* and its derivatives are not employed prior to Deuteronomy, scholars argue for an early date for the development of the concept of election. Byron Shafer gives four bits of evidence for an early date for Israel's election:²⁴ (1) The pattern of divine royal election in the Ancient Near Eastern Literature is not sufficient to explain Israel's use of the word *bahar*; (2) Evidence of Theophoric names using the root *bahar* goes back to 1900 BC in the ANE texts (*ibhar* in 2 Sam 5:15; 1 Chr 3:6; 14:5); (3) The Old Testament idea of election of Israel did not move from the mythic realm of divine royal election to the historical choice of Israel, because in the earliest passages of Deuteronomy (10:14-15; 17-18, 21-22) and in Ps 47 Yahweh is a cosmic or universal God;²⁵ (4) The idea that the election of the patriarchs is a late retrojection is disputed because all key passages in Deuteronomy (4:32-40; 7:7-8; 14:1-2) link the election of Israel to the promises to the patriarchs. A good illustration is the introduction to the Exodus in Ex 2:23-25:

The Israelites, groaning in their slavery cried out for help and from the depths of their slavery their cry came up to God. God heard their groaning; God remembered the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God saw the Israelites and took note.

The motive for divine intervention in the life of the Hebrew people suffering in Egypt was the covenant Yahweh had made with the patriarchs.

We have cited in the introduction of this article Deut 7:6 which gives the concept of election in its classical formulation. Pondering the story of Israel's origins and calling, the author of Deuteronomy

22. Cf. Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, 27, 44.

23. Cf. Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology*, 132-133.

24. Cf. Byron Shafer, "The Root *bhr* and the Pre-exilic Concept of Chosenness in the Hebrew Bible," *ZAW* 20 (1977) 36.

25. Cf. F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973, 244-245.

portrays Moses as defining the divine election for all time²⁶. In Deut 7:6 the key word is *bahar*. Yahweh chose out this people and consecrated it (*qadosh*, "set it apart") as his own, bestowing upon it a unique value (*segullah*).

At the time when the book of Deuteronomy was composed the word *bahar* was used for the ordinary, everyday act of choosing and selecting. Likewise *bahar* was used for human decisions which have moral and religious implications.²⁷ This term had a theological sense too. In the Old Testament, the word *bahar* conveys a relatively narrow portion of the idea when it is used theologically, i.e., while speaking of Yahweh's choice of Israel to be his people'. It is to be noted that every where that *bahar* occurs in relationship to persons, it denotes choice out of a group, generally out of the totality of the people, so that the chosen one discharges a function in relationship to the group. Thus throughout *bahar* includes the idea of separating, but in the sense that the ones separated *by bahar* stood that much more clearly in the service of the whole people²⁸. In this consideration of the meaning of the term *bahar* in a typically theological sense of the election of the people of Israel the opinion of Horst Seebass is relevant:

In my opinion the election of the people in the Old Testament is to be treated in a similar way. The horizon of the election of the people of Israel is the peoples of the world, in relationship to which as a whole the 'individual' Israel was chosen. *bhr* as a technical term for election of the people of Israel stands under the symbol of universalism.²⁹

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- 26. Whether or not the author of Deuteronomy was the first to speak of Yahweh's choice of the people of Israel, Deuteronomy contains the most thorough and penetrating reflection on the concept of election within the Bible. Cf. Dale Patrich, "Election" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed.) David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992, 435-436.
 - 27. Cf. Horst Seebass, "*bachar*" in *TDOT* 11, 73-87.
 - 28. Cf. Horst Seebass, "*bachar*", 83.
 - 29. Horst Seebass, "*bachar*", 83. According to William Lasor, the word *bahar* is positive and does not convey the meaning of rejection of what is not chosen. It stresses the idea of selection or preference with no explication of reprobation. Cf. William Lasor, *The Truth about Armageddon*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982, 37.

As the people chosen out of the nations, Israel has its role in the circle of nations. This is to be understood in the background of Deut 7:6 which assumes that Israel was quite willing to compromise with the neighbours, especially the Canaanites: learning from them and intermarrying with them. The fact is that the Canaanite way of life and religiosity had a great attraction for Israel. But Israel was required to be unyielding to these temptations. Actually the Deuteronomist sees in the Canaanite religions those things which are not sanctioned by God, namely idolatrous practices.

If Israel does not take an inflexible stand against this religion, she can never be the people of Yahweh, because he can never be understood as he really is as long as Canaanitism is connected with him (...). In this case *bhr* means that in her struggle against the Canaanite spirit Israel is the people chosen with reference to all peoples, in that all religions have to take their stand in the struggle Israel undertakes paradigmatically and in the final analysis inflexibly.³⁰

In the Old Testament, *bahar* is used to denote the situation of the special relationship. It implies that Israel has the mission of maintaining her identity and of resisting the temptation to be assimilated by the nations because election means a mission to the nations.³¹

Complementary to what has been said above about election focussing on the chief term *bahar*, we make a brief remark about covenant theme, which is the all-penetrating religious concept of the Old Testament. Recent studies have shown that the covenant was the principle of Israel's unity as a people.³² The original meaning of *berith*, most frequently translated as covenant, is not agreement, or settlement between two parties. *Berith* implies first and foremost the notion of 'imposition, liability or obligation'.³³ A gracious election

30. Horst Seebass, "*bachar*", 84.

31. Cf Horst Seebass, "*bachar*", 87. A good illustration of this can be found in the use of the word *bachar* in Neh 9:7 referring to the election of Abraham in the context of prayer in a syncretist background of the post-exilic period.

32. Cf John L. McKenzie, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* 77:82-83. Bangalore: TPI, 1990, 1298.

33. Cf. M. Weinfeld, "*Berith*", *TDOT* 11, 253. Cf. G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant" in *IDB* 1. Nashville: Abingdon 1981, 715-716 (Covenant terminology in the Bible).

is the basis of the covenant. Unlike the other religions, the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is the result of this positive action of Yahweh, of electing and establishing a covenant. The Old Testament uses a number of analogies to designate this special relationship of Yahweh and Israel; the analogy of father-son, the analogy of marriage, the analogy of shepherd and flock and the analogy of kinsman are the frequently occurring; the analogy of king and subjects is also implicit in some passages.³⁴ The basic illustration of this relationship is by the covenant theme. Four instances of divine covenant with man are found in the Old Testament. The covenant with Noah (Gen 9:9), covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:18-21; 17:1-18), covenant at Sinai (Ex 19:1-24:18) and covenant with David (1Sam7:8-16; 23:5; 1Kings 8:23-25; Ps 89:2-38). Of these four instances of divine covenant, the first one is a universalistic covenant with the humanity and the last one - the Davidic covenant - is one addressed to an individual with the content of a particular blessing. The Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant establish the unique relationship of Yahweh with the people of Israel as the people of election.

3. Analysis of the Election-Texts

The easiest and most authoritative means of verifying and ascertaining the exclusivistic or universalistic implications of divine election is to analyze the texts, which deal with the election of Israel. One has to be very selective in this because many passages related to the election of Israel can be cited from the Pentateuchal and historical sources of the Old Testament. Here we concentrate on two texts: i) dealing with the call of Abraham, ii) dealing with the Mosaic Covenant. These two events are the basic experiences of the election of Israel.

Yahweh said to Abraham, 'Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for a country which I shall show you; and I shall make you a great nation. I shall bless you and make your name famous; you are to be a blessing; I shall bless those who bless you and shall curse those who curse you, and all clans on earth will bless themselves by you.' (Gen 12:1-3).

34. Cf. John L. McKenzie, *"Aspects of Old Testament Thought, 77:14, 1297.*

Abraham is commanded by Yahweh to leave his native land. Settling in Haran is to end as for the nations in Gen 11:8-9 in a further migration. But, here, the movement of Abraham is not through Yahweh's "scattering" but from a direct call to go to 'a land' which Yahweh will show him. In vv. 2-3 seven blessings are mentioned. These are aspects of God's favour towards Abraham enhancing his individual and family life. "You are to be a blessing" (v.2c). People will use Abraham as a standard of blessing.³⁵ Abraham is called by Yahweh and separated from his own country, kindred and father's house. The election of Abraham is for his own advantage because Yahweh says that he will make a great nation out of him; his name will become famous. The election of Abraham has its universalistic aspect: "you will become a blessing! "All clans on earth will bless themselves by you." The election of Abraham ushers in blessings for all nations. None is excluded from the blessings that will flow through Abraham.

Abrahamic covenant is preserved in two forces coming from the J tradition (Gen 15:1-21) and from the P tradition (Gen 17:1-14). In the J tradition we read:

That day Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham in these forms: To your descendants I give this country, from the River of Egypt to the great River, the River Euphrates, the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadamonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgoshites, and the Jebusites (Gen 15:18-21).

Text shows that Lord made a covenant with Abram.³⁶ The list of the nations to be given to Abram is ten. Abram is to become father of the nations and these nations are given to him. It is not enmity

35. Cf. Roland J. Clifford, "Genesis", *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2:20, 24, 26. Bangalore: TPI, 1990, 20, 22.

36. Some scholars see this as an oath rather than a covenant because later texts, Gen 24:7; 50:24; Deut 7:8, 12, 13; 8:1, 18 etc. speak of an oath sworn to the fathers. Extrabiblical parallels and elements in the text itself however affirm this to be a covenant. Part of the controversy about the oath versus covenant arises from modern theological ideas. Cf. D. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (AnBib 21, A), Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978, "Introduction". Cf. Also Roland J. Clifford, "Genesis", *NJBC* 2:24, 21.

that is established by God between Abram and the nations. The relationship is that of solidarity. The fatherhood of Abram is, in a sense, extended to these nations. According to the P tradition in Gen 17:1-14 *El Shaddai* initiates a covenant with Abram, changing his name to Abraham. The initiative of the covenant is God's but the relationship established is reciprocal.

And I shall grant a covenant between myself and you and make you very numerous (...). For my part, this is my covenant with you. You will become the father of many nations. And you are no longer to be called Abram; your name is to be Abraham, for I am making you father of many nations. I shall make you exceedingly fertile, I shall make you into nations and your issue will be kings. And I shall maintain my covenant between myself and you (...) as a covenant in perpetuity to be your God and the God of your descendants after you... (Gen 17:2-8).

These covenant blessings are not restricted to Abraham personally, nor to his direct descendent and contemporaries only. It extends to all men. Through Abraham, God reaches out to bless all the families of the earth.³⁷ What is implied in the covenant with Abraham as clearly anticipated in the call-narrative in Gen 12:1-3 also, is that the initiative lies with God, for Israel enjoys the favoured position of an elect nation not because of merit but because of divine benevolence. This divine election and covenant relationship is in the midst of the nations and on behalf of the nations. The tone of the text is not exclusivistic; instead it is evidently universalistic. The election of Abraham is for the blessing of all nations; He is the father of a multitude of nations.³⁸

The second theme is the election of Israel as a nation. The passages on the call of Moses and the Sinaitic covenant may be considered. God made known his identity as "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." (Ex 3:6). Then God said:

And I have come down to rescue them from the clutches of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that country,

37. Cf. L. Hicks, "Abraham" in *IDB I*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981, 16.

38. Cf. L. Hicks, "Abraham", 15.

to a country rich and broad, to a country flowing with milk and honey, to the home of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites (Ex 3:8).

In another passage relating to the call of Moses we have a clearer articulation of the election of Israel:

God spoke to Moses and said to him, 'I am Yahweh. To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob I appeared as *El Shaddai* but I did not make my name Yahweh known to them. I also made my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the country in which they were living as aliens. Furthermore, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, enslaved by the Egyptians and have remembered my covenant. So say to the Israelites, "I am Yahweh (...) I shall take you as my people and I shall be your God. And you will know that I am Yahweh your God, who has freed you from the forced labour of the Egyptians. Then I shall lead you into the country which I swore I would give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and shall give it to you as your heritage, I Yahweh (Ex 6:28).

This is a passage attributed to the P source. According to P source God was known to the patriarchs as *El Shaddai*, 'God Almighty' (Gen 17:1; 35:11; 48:3). It was at Sinai God revealed the name Yahweh. God mentions his covenantal promises to the patriarchs. The people of Israel are true inheritants of these covenantal promises. At the call of Moses itself God makes known to the people that they will be a privileged people of Yahweh (v.7). The Israelite conception of election, of God's choice of Israel to be his own possession among all nations arose from the primary inference from God's act of deliverance from slavery.³⁹

The more striking text is Ex 19:5-6 which is a part of the section on the sealing of the covenant (19:1-24:18).

So now if you are really prepared to obey me and keep my covenant, you, out of all peoples, shall be my

39. Cf. G.E. Wright, "Book of Exodus", in *IDB II*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981, 196.

personal possession, for the whole world is mine. For me you shall be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation". (Ex 19:5-6a).

Exodus event is the setting in which Israel grasped its special relationship with Yahweh. Israel is chosen out of all nations to be Yahweh's personal possession. It is important to take note of the divine affirmations: "for the whole world is mine." The divine lordship of Yahweh over the whole world is forcefully proclaimed in the context of the manifestation of the election of Israel as a nation. Israel is chosen in order that it may be a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation". The sacramental function of the people of Israel is implied in this affirmation. Among the nations Israel has to be a holy nation⁴⁰. In Ex 29:45 this is further elaborated: "And I shall live with the Israelites and be their God, and they will know that I am Yahweh their God who brought them out of Egypt to live among them. I, Yahweh their God". Israel itself becomes a dwelling place of Yahweh. Yahweh does not dwell on earth as the human beings dwell in a place but he has graciously consented to 'tent' in his people's midst (1King 8:27). The election of the people of Israel is to make present the transcendent God in the midst of the nations. They are to be the mediators before Yahweh on behalf of the nations. Israel's vocation is to be a priestly people; so her election is to do priestly mediation among the nations.

From this sketchy presentation of the texts on the election of the people of Israel focussing on the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants which serve as the basic articulation of the Israelite faith conviction about the election, it is made clear that there is an inclusive not exclusive aspect. The election of Israel gives Israel an identity of its own but this does not alienate it from other nations. The nations have a place in this divine election of Israel, they too are beneficiaries of this election of the people of Israel.

4. Universalistic Aspects of Election :

A Theological Synthesis

The terminological and textual considerations have clarified that the election of the patriarchs and Israel is the truth pervasive of the

40. Cf. G.E. Wright, "Book of Exodus", 197.

Old Testament. But the idea was not always properly understood by those who were 'called'. Israel often drew conclusions from their calling that were contrary to a true understanding of God's nature - the benevolent love - the basis of their calling.⁴¹ They stiffened into rigid exclusivism, interpreting their election, which had become a misconceived and hardened idea, as a duty to hate and a matter of pride.⁴² The book of Deuteronomy severely condemned the attitude of pride (Deut 7:7). The Old Testament doctrine of election allows no room for pride. But the fact is that the idea of election is so misconceived that when one begins to use the term "choose" the ideas of exclusiveness, arbitrariness, favouritism or special privilege immediately arise. There is no exclusiveness in God's love; though preferential love is a biblical fact. If we look into the historical books we can see that election of Israel does not exclude other nations. Other nations are integrated into the divine plan of salvation. This integration is illustrated in the salvation history by the events such as the kind dealing of the Gibeonites, a people of Palestine, by Joshua at the time of the occupation of Canaan (Joshua 9:3-27), the inclusion of Ruth, a Moabitess, in the ancestral history of David (Ruth 1:4), the inclusion of Hiram, the king of Tyre as one of the architects of the temple of Jerusalem (1 Kings 5:15-26; 7:13-14) and of the palace of the king (2 Sam 5:11-12), the invocation of Solomon at the consecration of the temple on behalf of the nations (1 King 8:41-43), the inclusion of Cyrus as the benevolent king who redirected by his edict of liberation those exiled (2 Chr 36:22-23), the sympathetic attitude of the Persian rulers (Neh 2:1-8) and the wide diplomatic relationships by various kings and rulers of Israel.

At the same time in the later period, as witnessed by the book of Deuteronomy, there are instances where elimination of the other nation was demanded by the faith of the people. Deut 7:1-6 puts it very sharply (cf Ex 23:31-33). Many instances of execution of the ban can be seen in the historical books (Num 21:2; Deut 20:16; Josh

41. Cf. Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology*, 133.

42. Cf. Edmund Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament III*, 204. From the beginning it was the belief in the divine election that shaped the proper direction of the Israelite people. It brought with it an aggressive exclusivism. Cf Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, 23.

6:18; 1Sam 15:24; 1Kings 20:42 etc). The Canaanites were destined for destruction (Deut 7:1-3; 20:16-18; Josh 2:10; 6:17) in order that Israel might not be led to idolatry (Deut 7:4).⁴³ Though Joshua was credited with accomplishing their wholesale extermination (Josh 10:1; 28:40; 11:11-21) Israelites were unable to carry out the destruction (1 Kings 9:21). Exclusion or elimination is seen in the history of the people of Israel only in so far as a people are inimical to God or resisting God's plans. Those who are potential sources of leading Israel to idolatry are looked at with contempt: they are to be eliminated. But this does not mean that the "non-elect" are excluded. Even the elected are so treated when they stand against God; a good illustration is the sin of Achan in not complying with the law of ban imposed by Joshua at the capture of Jericho (Josh 6:17-18; Josh 7:1,24). In the narrative on the Sinaitic covenant in Ex 19:1-25, the people of Israel are advised by Moses not to approach the mountain of theophany lest they perish (Ex 19:12-13). The anger of Yahweh kills the priest Uzzah since he dared to touch the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam 6:7). These and similar instances are examples of the profound sense of respect and fear before Yahweh, the almighty God. They are expressions of the religious sentiments of a community before the transcendence of God, the 'mysterium tremendum': these are not to be interpreted as exclusivist. Likewise the punishments imposed on some nations are not to be interpreted in an exclusivistic sense.

Now that we have clarified the negative instances in the historical books of the Old Testament, we attempt at a synthesis of the positive aspects of the election of Israel vis-à-vis the nations. It is a truth of revelation that God chose Israel. Acknowledging the mystery of the steadfast love of Yahweh as the ground of election (Deut 7:7-8),⁴⁴ we can affirm that Israel was chosen to be a blessing to the nations. Israel was to serve the nations by being a revelation of Yahweh to them (Isa 42:5-7)⁴⁵. Thus Israel's election is for service. Through Israel God will reveal Himself to other nations. Election is never an

43. Cf. M. H. Pope, "Devoted", in *IDB II*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981, 839.

44. Cf. Christoph Barth, *God with Us*, 41.

45. Cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, 39, 54-68. Cf. also Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 88.

end in itself. It is for a mission. Israel's election is to mediate God's grace to the nations ⁴⁶; Yahweh's witness. By electing Israel to be his witness among the nations Yahweh manifests his preferential love. This revelation of God's preferential love does not mean rejection of the others. God is the sovereign. Divine election is the expression of divine sovereignty. This fact is brought out in the preferential treatment of the firstborn (Ex 13:20) in the biblical history, which does not mean that the next-born ones are not loved. Israel is Yahweh's firstborn (Ex 4:22). This election of Israel as firstborn is no rejection of the other nations because "the whole earth belongs to me" (Ex 19:5) and therefore God can do, as he will; he can choose whom he will.

Conclusion

Placing ourselves in the exclusivistic context of fundamentalist religious adherents of many religions, we were investigating the universalistic elements of the election of Israel. Informing ourselves about the trends in the study of the theme of election we tried to analyze the key concepts of *bahar* and *berith* in order to see their implied meanings. Then we tried to analyze two key texts from the Pentateuchal sources: the Abrahamic election and the Mosaic covenant. Then we tried to trace the universalistic elements of the election of Israel.

God, who is the source of election, is the absolute sovereign creator and saviour of the whole creation. His plan of salvation is universal. "The whole world is mine" (Ex 19:5); God is absolutely free to dispense his goodness and grace. Election is a free gift granted by God for his own sake. Looking into the biblical reality, one has no reason to be proud. It is not because of any merit of Israel that God chose her. Election of Israel by no means implies the rejection of the other nations. Israel was elected to be a sacrament of God's benevolent love to the nations. Election is the task of leading other nations to God. In electing Israel, God sought the whole world. As Th.C.Vriezen has rightly put it: "In Israel, God sought the world. Israel was God's point of attack on the world".⁴⁷ Israel herself had a lot of openness to other nations and other religions. The election of

46. Cf. William Lasor, *The Truth about Armageddon*, 36. Cf. also Horst Seebass, "bachar", 83.

47. Th.C.Vriezen, *Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 88.

Israel, with all its details is a revelatory action of God: that God is the saviour of the world. God chose Israel for service of Him and for service to the nations: to be a sacrament of his redeeming love for the world, His witness.

This reflection on the universalistic implication of the election of Israel helps us to have a better understanding of the "electedness" of the church. It is absolutely true that God's benevolent love is manifested in the election of the church. This, by no means, implies the rejection of other nations and religions. Church is called to be a herald among the nations and in the midst of religions of the goodness of God revealed to and experienced as well as reciprocated by her. Exclusivistic attitude is irrelevant; open and universalistic attitude is indispensable. The best articulation of this attitude is given by Vat.II: "the church on earth is by its very nature missionary."⁴⁸

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48. Vat. 11, *Ad Gentes*, 2. Austin Flannery (ed.) *Vatican Council II*. Bombay: St. Paul's Press, 1991, 731.

The Prophetic Dream of a Universal Community

Mathew Manakatt

Prophets dreamt of a universal community. This is evident especially in the book of second and third Isaiah. This article spotlights this prophetic picture against the historical background of racial exclusivism, narrow nationalism and religious intolerance of the post exilic period in Palestine.

Introduction

Israel was a Covenant community. The book of Exodus describes the birth of the community, how a wandering crowd became a theocratic kingdom at the foot of mount Sinai (Exod 19:6: "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"). This was effected by means of the Sinaitic Covenant through the mediatorship of Moses, the prophet. The rest of the book of Exodus presents and describes the Covenant stipulations and laws of the community. Leviticus deals with the holy nature of the community. The book of Numbers describes the communal organization of the community, and Deuteronomy speaks about the spirit of love that all the members of the community should have to God and towards each other.

When we examine the story of the people of God from its settlement in Canaan till the Babylonian exile, we see that when the rule of judges gave way to monarchy, manifold problems arose in the Israelite community. The covenantal bond became very weak both in the vertical and horizontal levels. The people deserted Yahweh and went after other gods. The village courts became corrupt. The society was sharply divided into two, the "haves" and "have-nots", the powerful and the powerless, the oppressors and the oppressed. The people were totally estranged from Yahweh as well as from one another to such an extent that the prophet Isaiah qualifies them as "a people laden with iniquity", and "offspring of evildoers" (Is 1:4). But Yahweh did not want to leave "His beloved" in the condition of a

"besieged city" (Is 1:8). Therefore He raised some of their sons as prophets, and some of their young men as Nazirites, in an attempt to bring them back. But they "made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets saying 'you shall not prophesy' " (Amos 2:11-12), thus desecrating the persons consecrated to God and silencing the Word of God. Therefore the Lord handed over the people into the hands of Babylonians (587 BC).

The Babylonian exile lasted for 50 years, during which Yahweh sent to the people prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel who consoled and strengthened them. Though the remnant was restored and repatriated according to the edict of Cyrus in 538 BC, the post-exilic community was not without problems. The society was divided into several groups which were not properly integrated into the community. The tensions and problems were aggravated by the delusion of the repatriated Israelites. Besides, Ezra and Nehemiah were following the policy of racial exclusiveness, narrow nationalism and religious intolerance.

During the Babylonian exile and later the prophets addressed the problems of the society in different ways. The whole book of Jonah could be considered as an attack on the rigid nationalism and religious intolerance of the post-exilic Jewish community. When we examine the prophetic oracles, especially those of Second Isaiah (Is 40-55) and Third Isaiah (Is 56-66), we find certain texts/passages which speak about an ideal society that shall be established in the future. These texts could be taken as the expression of the prophetic dream of a universal community. The important texts in this regard are Is 42:1-4; 45:18-25; 49:1-6; 55:1-5; 56:1-8; 58:1-12; 65:25; and 66:18-23. The messianic texts of First Isaiah (9:1-7; 11:1-9) and texts like Ezek 17:22-24; Hab 2:14 and Zech 9:9-10 also contain elements of a similar expectation. A closer look at some of these texts seems very important and fruitful, especially at this juncture of history when humanity has entered the threshold of the new millennium and the Christians are immersed in the pompous and gorgeous celebrations of the great jubilee 2000. Such a study seems relevant to us today since the Church in India is facing a lot of challenges to the work of evangelization from within and without. The words of the prophets may also lead us to examine our attitude to the people of other religions and societies and the strategies that we employ in the work of evangelization.

Is 42:1-4 and 49:1-9

The above texts are taken together because they form part of the so called "Servant Songs" of Isaiah. It was B.Duhm who in his commentary on the book of Isaiah formally proposed for the first time the existence of a special collection in II Isaiah, namely Is 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53,12. He called these four passages "the Servant Songs"¹. There are different opinions regarding the authorship of these songs and about their connection to the rest of the book. Majority of scholars seem to hold the opinion that the four poems were composed by a post-exilic author who lived after II Isaiah. Probably he wrote them in the first half of the 5th century under the literary influence of II Isaiah himself, Jeremiah and also of the book of Job.

Coming to Is 42:1-4 it seems that in the composition of this song the author makes use of the form and style employed by kings to officially present the new ministers also announcing the charges entrusted to them.² In the present text Yahweh seems to point to someone, designates him as his servant and announces the charges entrusted to him. Presenting the servant as his chosen and beloved, the Lord says how He has equipped him for the mission given: "I have put my spirit upon him" (v.1b). The purpose of filling the servant with His spirit is given in the statement about the task of the servant expressed in 3 clauses: He will bring forth justice to the nations (v.1c); he will faithfully bring forth justice (v.3c); he will establish justice in the earth (v.4b). So executing justice (*mispāt*) takes the primary place in the mission of the servant. The word *mispāt* means also 'judgement'. Referring to the occurrence of the word in Is 41:1-15.21-29 which present a trial of the gentile nations, authors like C.Westermann state that the servant's task according to 42:1-4 would be to bring judgement upon the Gentiles.³ J.Begrich also interprets *mispāt* as judgement and condemnation. But a closer look at the text seem to speak against such a negative interpretation of the task of the servant. Vv.2-3 give a detailed picture of the method used by the servant to

1. B.Duam, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Gottingen 1892).

2. Cf. P.E. Dion, "L'universalisme religieux dans les différentes couches rédactionnelles d'Isaïe 40-55", *Biblica* 51.2(1970) 174.

3. C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (London 1985) 95

establish *mispat*. "He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench..". This humble and soft ways of the servant does not go hand in hand with understanding the text as judgement and condemnation of the nations. Besides, it is very clearly stated at the end of the song that "the coastlands wait for his law" (v.4b). "Coastlands" refer to the gentile nations. It is natural and logical to think that the gentiles are not waiting for a negative judicial decision about them.

In the light of the above discussions, the interpretation of P. Volz seems to be more meaningful and suited to the image of the servant that the text provides. This author takes *mispat* as meaning 'truth' or 'true religion' and sees the servant as a missionary to the gentiles. Understood in this sense, to establish *mispat* means to establish "the rule of the will of God", which is the practical side of true religion. V. 4 asserts that the servant would finally succeed in carrying out his mission of establishing justice on the earth. That means that the servant of Yahweh will succeed in establishing the rule of God among the other nations and would thus found a universal community based on the love of God. However, the mission of the servant need not necessarily mean an official proclamation of the Torah and bringing all the nations under Israel, but the establishment of law and order, justice and righteousness among the gentile nations.

The second Song of the Servant (Is 49:1-6) begins where the first ended, by taking up the expression "coastlands" which was the concluding word of the first song. Besides, Is 49:1-6 is a text marked out by an inclusion through the usage of "coastlands" and "end of the earth" in v.1a and 6b respectively, giving a universal character and context to the second song. These are clear indications of the fact that the essential theme of Is 49:1-6 is the prophet's special mission to the foreign nations. Though an explicit reference to the universal mission and salvation appears only in the concluding verse, it is clear that the whole Song leads to it. Everything that precedes, including the failure of the servant's mission to Israel, is only a stage setting. The text begins with a summons to hear: "Listen to me, O coastlands, and hearken, you peoples from afar" (v.1a). So the servant (prophet) is addressing the distant nations. The oracle that follows has three parts: 1) the call and equipment of the Servant (vv.1b-3), 2) the despondency of the prophet (v.4), and 3) the new mission given to the Servant (vv.5-6).

The Lord called the servant from the womb of his mother (as in Jer 1:5) and equipped him with His words. The penetrating words of Yahweh made the mouth of the servant like a sharp sword, and he began his mission in the midst of Israel. But the mission was a failure and he said: "I have laboured in vain.." (v.4). It is in this context that the servant is given a new mission: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach the end of the earth" (v.8b). What is implied in this mission does not seem to be just the proclamation of Yahweh as the universal saviour. Proclamation is only the first step. One can say that salvation reaches the ends of the earth only when the nations accept and acknowledge Yahweh as the Lord and Saviour, i.e., only when the prophetic dream of a universal community is realized. It is important to note that the servant was chosen even from the womb of his mother in order to fulfil his mission of establishing a universal community which acknowledges Yahweh as the Saviour. To be a light to the nations was not a secondary responsibility of the servant, rather a task given to him at the very moment of his call. The servant is equipped with the word of God so that he can really enlighten the nations and bring them to enjoy salvation.

Is 45:18-25

Is 45:18-25 is a fundamental text expressing the universality of salvation. "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other... To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear" (vv.22-23). The invitation to turn to Yahweh and be saved is addressed to the whole world. The basis for this call is the fact that Yahweh is the only God and Saviour. This monotheistic assertion is given thrice (v.18 and v.21) before the invitation to turn to Yahweh. This God is also the one who formed the earth not in chaos, but in such a way that all can live in it peacefully. Thus the benevolence of God is extended to the ends of the earth, to the whole human race. Once the invitation of the only God and saviour reaches the ends of the earth, all the nations will accept Him as the Lord. This universal acceptance will be expressed through the gestures of total submission in a very solemn and definitive manner: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear" (v.23). In this universal plan of salvation consists the prophetic dream of a universal community. In fact in the unequivocal proclamation of Yahweh regarding the external gestures of total submission of the

whole world to Yahweh one finds the real foundation for the prophetic dream of a universal theocentric community. All nations of the world are invited to become members of this community. The membership in the universal community is based on the free confession of those who have discovered that Yahweh alone is God.

Is 55:1-5

This passage also begins with an invitation which is extended to all, precisely to all who thirst for water and hunger for real and satisfying bread (v.1). The imagery of bread is taken up in v.2 in a negative way referring to the those who were spending money for that which is not real and satisfying bread. It is in this background that v.3 announces the decision of Yahweh to make an everlasting Covenant with all the people. This eternal Covenant will be a sign of God's steadfast love for David. V. 4 continues to speak about David, viz. that David's call and kingship had universal dimensions in the mind of Yahweh. He was called to make him not only the king of Israel but a leader and commander for all the nations. Thus he was to be the witness of Yahweh to the peoples of the world. The new Covenant that Yahweh promises will be based on the steadfast love for David who was called to be the commander of all nations. In other words, what was sowed through the call of David shall bear fruit through the establishment of this new and everlasting covenant with the people. The universal character of this covenant is underlined in v. 5: "Behold, you shall call nations that you know not, and nations that knew you not shall run to you". The Covenant that Yahweh announced will be of such proportions that even foreign nations shall come into communion with her. The use of the verbs "call" and "run" in relation to the mission of Israel and the fruit of the mission implies that the coming together of the foreign nations into a universal community shall be a smooth process. There is no question of using force or bringing to submission from the part of Israel. The nations voluntarily come to Israel and that too as soon as they hear the message of salvation. The reason for such a quick and positive reaction from the side of the foreign nations is given at the end of v. 5: "because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel...", It is the Lord, the Holy one of Israel who is effecting the coming together of nations.⁴ Through the covenant at Sinai the people of Israel

4. In the study of Is 45:18-25 we saw that the basis of the universal call to salvation is the fact that Yahweh, the Lord of Israel is the only God and Saviour(vv.21-22).

became a theocratic nation, where as here through the everlasting covenant that the Holy one of Israel shall establish, all the nations of the world shall be brought together. Regarding the establishment of an everlasting covenant and the nature of the resulting community in relation to the reference to the steadfast love for David one may be prone to think in terms of the extension of Davidic empire as an eschatological empire or an ideal religious community.

Is 56:1-8

For a proper understanding of Is 56:1-8 it is important to give attention to the actual situation of the community to whom the prophet is addressing. The prophet is speaking to the post-exilic society of Israel which was characterized by the presence of different groups and a lot of tensions within and without. There was the remnant group who were brought back from Babylonian exile according to the edict of Cyrus in 538 BC. There were those people who had remained in the land without being deported to Babylon. There were groups who had kept their ethnic purity intact and those who through intermarriages had lost the purity of blood. Besides, there were also small groups that had not integrated fully into the community, namely the eunuchs (56:3) and the foreigners. Some of the tensions and problems in and among the groups are mentioned in passages like Is 57:3-21; 58:3-10; 59:3-8.13.20; 65:5-16; 66:5-6.14-17. As it is generally found in all societies, the internal tensions negatively affected those groups which were socially weaker. This was naturally because of the structure of the society. We know that the same was the case also in the pre-exilic community. Here the internal tensions and problems were aggravated by the delusion of the repatriated Israelites. During the exile the prophets had consoled them and prophesied about the coming glorious days in store for them when they come back to their land. The present condition of life in their land did not correspond to what the people had expected.

In the above social context of the prophet in 56:1-8, and the proposals that he makes for the formation of a new community acquire added importance. The central point that he makes, or the point of departure is that the new community to be formed is not one based on natural relationships, but on the ability and generosity to

welcome those who are different - the foreigner, the weak, the poor, the marginalized.

Deut 23:3-9 gave very strict laws regarding participation in the assembly of the Lord. "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none belonging to them shall enter the assembly of the Lord for ever..."(v.3). But the post-exilic society of Israel contained elements which were foreign to the Yahwistic community according to the above laws. For example, there were foreigners and eunuchs in the society. In Ezra and Nehemiah this problem was solved by separating and excluding the foreign elements. Ezra 9-10 describes in detail how meticulously this separation was done by putting away foreign wives together with their children in order to keep racial purity. But the solution proposed by the prophet is not separation and exclusion but integration (56:1-8).

Let us examine the text more closely. The text begins with an exhortation in the name Yahweh to keep justice and righteousness in society. This is given as a means to participate in the salvation offered by the Lord. V. 2 announces blessings on everyone who does justice, observes Sabbath and abstains from doing evil things. In the background of vv.1-2 the next verse presents two concrete groups in their own words: "Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; and let not the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree' " (v.3). In the background of the blessings and curses defined by tradition the foreigner and the eunuch acknowledge their condition of being not worthy of the blessings announced by the law. The words of the foreigner as well as those of the eunuch possibly express also the experience of rejection that they had from the people. But the prophet forbids both of them from saying that they do not belong to the people of God by quoting the word of God. The word of God is expressed in the form of a judicial response: "To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off" (vv. 4-5). This assurance given to the eunuchs regarding their acceptance into the cult community is almost the opposite of what is given in Deut.23:1 which explicitly forbids the unproductive men from entering the

assembly of Yahweh: "he whose testicles are crushed or whose male member is cut off shall not enter the assembly of the Lord." Probably it is to this Deuteronomic law that the eunuch refers to when he says, "I am a dry tree" (v.3). The eunuch shall not be a member of the assembly of the Lord because he cannot fulfil the basic command of descendance: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28; Lev 21:20). So according to the law his membership in the community is based on his natural and physical capacity to generate children. But the promise of Yahweh regarding the acceptance of the eunuch into the cult community overrides this law. One who is marked by the fate of not belonging to the community is received by the Lord and he becomes an active member of the community. He will be given a name better than sons and daughters, an everlasting name that shall never be cut off. "Giving an everlasting name" is better understood in the light of the promise that Yahweh made to Abram: "I will bless you and make your name great" (Gen 12:2). One's name is made great or everlasting through his offspring. Abraham's name was made great through his descendants. Understood in this way the words of Yahweh regarding the eunuchs assure "the dry tree" a status similar to those who can beget children. He shall no more be considered a dry tree.

Similarly, Yahweh speaks about the foreigners: "And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant - these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (vv.6-7). The foreigner is one who is a stranger to Israel. The Law of Moses prescribes an entirely different approach to a foreigner compared to the approach to an Israelite. Deut 15:1-3 says: "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to this neighbour; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, his brother, because the Lord's release has been proclaimed. Of a foreigner you may exact it; but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release." See also Deut 17:15. The foreigners and their lands are considered impure (Lev 22:25; Deut 14:21; Neh 13:30; Amos 7:17). According to Ezek 44:7-9 the foreigners should be

excluded from the service of the temple because they are uncircumcised in body and in heart. Exod 12:43 prohibits a stranger from eating the Passover meal. Ezra and Nehemiah made this separation even stricter (Ezra 9-10; Neh 9:2). A foreigner cannot form part of the community because he is not a son of Israel. But the words of Yahweh in Is 56:6-7 assure the foreigner a treatment which is exactly the same as that of an Israelite. No distinction whatsoever is made between a stranger and an Israelite with regard to their right to participate in the assembly of the Lord: "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (v.7). The foreigners shall also be brought to the holy mountain of the Lord, and shall be joyful in His house of prayer.

The text of Isaiah ends with a threefold repetition of the verb "gather" in a single verse (v.8): "Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered." These words express a sharp contrast with the condition of separation that the foreigner and eunuch experience, concludes the movement of the text and leads to a unique vision of a new community. This community is not based on natural rights or human power, but on a free adherence to God. The possibility of this new universal community is the free gift of God, not the result of natural belongingness. Therefore the solution to the problems of the post-exilic community is not separation of "foreign" elements (as proposed by Ezra Nehemiah), but their integration into the society based on a new idea of fraternal relationship and the gratuitous gift of Yahweh.

Is 58:1-12

The discussion here is about the question of fasting as practised by the people of Israel and the fasting that is pleasing to God. We shall concentrate on vv.5-12. These verses give an answer to the question, What is effective fasting? After an attack on the desecration of the days of fasting (vv.3b-4), and the external rituals prescribed for the days of fasting (v.5) the prophet goes on to speak about the fasting that is pleasing to God. "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself

from your own flesh?" (vv.6-7). These are perhaps the most radical words about fasting ever spoken. In defining a fasting which is pleasing to God, the prophet includes receiving the wandering homeless into our house, into our community. This definition of fasting and the exhortation to consider the vagabond as a part of the community is really astonishing when understood in the background of the narrow nationalism and rigid social structure of the post-exilic Jewish community to which we referred to earlier. This is just opposed to the common attitude towards the different alien groups and the policy of exclusion that was advocated.

The definition of fasting as given by the prophet underlines the fact that the basis of proper and effective fasting consists in maintaining good relationship with God and humans. The traditional fasting was aimed at maintaining and promoting the vertical dimension. But their fasting consisted mainly in the external rites and hence did not help them to keep even the vertical dimension intact. The rupture in relationship to fellowmen resulted in the estrangement with Yahweh (Is 1:15). On the contrary the fasting that takes into consideration the needy brothers, has the power to lead one to an intimate relation with God.

Is 56:1-8 and Is 58:1-12 are a very strong attack on the traditional norms of community building as practised by the post-exilic Jews. In the dream of III Isaiah a living and true community is one not based upon natural relationships and Jewish laws, but one where the stranger, the homeless, the weak and the needy are considered "one's own flesh" (v.7b). This will be a universal community where there is no Jew or gentile, but only brothers and sisters, a model community.

Is 65:25 (Is 9:1-7; 11:1-9)

Is 65:25 gives a very symbolic presentation of the nature of the new community. "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord". This text has to be interpreted together with the messianic prophecies in Is 9:1-7 and Is 11:1-9. Is 9:1-7 announces the coming of a great liberator. Verses 1-2 seem to imply that the political liberation and restoration of Israel is to honour and glory is the theme of the text. This is also often interpreted in this way, and it may be that some

powerful political liberator is also meant. But it is not easy to understand such an explanation at this stage in the history of Israel. The people of Israel were under the yoke of Assyria and it continued up to 722 when Israel was finally defeated and people were deported to Assyria. The text probably speaks (also!) about an eschatological community. The word 'people' in v.2 suggests a totality rather than the territory of Israel. The names given to the liberator also point to a saviour of universal proportions or give the picture of an eschatological deliverer: "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (v.6b). V. 7 speaks about the kingdom that this "mighty God" would establish. This new kingdom will be one of lasting peace and shall be upheld with justice and righteousness.

The theme of the righteous rule and the resulting peace announced in Is 9:7 is taken up and developed in Is 11:1-9. This text, especially vv. 6-9 describes the new kingdom, in terms of a universal community of lasting peace, but in a symbolic way: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion shall grow up together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The suckling child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." These words describe in a unique way the expectation of the return of primeval peace which embraces both men and animals. In the primeval times man and animals did not hurt one another, even for food, but were content with vegetarian food. The text expresses also a longing for a life without any danger.⁵

Though the external image in Is 11:6-9 is that of peace in nature and in the animal kingdom, there is no doubt that the words refer to the nature of the new kingdom, the true peace that shall be the characteristic of the future community of perfect peace and harmony. This harmonious community where the wolf and lamb dwell together is pictured as the result of an unconditionally righteous rule of the new "shoot from the stump of Jesse". The text underlines two things about this Davidic king. "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him...

5. See O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12, A Commentary* (OTL; London 1986) 259-260.

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord" (vv.2-3). According to the Semitic understanding "fear of God" is not merely a numinous awe before God, but the acceptance of God as the guide and principle of one's life. It comes into play also in the recognition of the rights of the weaker members of the society. Vv.3b-5 elucidate very well the righteous rule of the king who has accepted God as the guide and principle of life. Qualifying the judgements that he makes, v.3b states that the new king "shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear'. He has the capacity not to be deceived by appearances. He will not blindly follow what is submitted to him on whatever pretext. This could be understood in two ways, either as referring to the meticulous care and attention taken in pronouncing judgements upon another, or to the fact that he is given a share in God's capacity to see through the external appearances. Taken in either way it refers to a very important quality that a ruler should have. But it seems better to take it in the second possibility of sharing in the special capacity of Yahweh. One is reminded of the words of the Lord to Samuel in the context of the rejection of Saul: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks, but the Lord looks on the heart" (I Sam 16:7). Because he has the capacity to see the heart of man he makes decisions with righteousness and with equity "for the meek of the earth". 'Equity' qualifies the king as one who is specially concerned to help even the most insignificant and marginalized to obtain justice in their struggle with the powerful.

The statement "with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" has great importance in the background of the 8th century prophets' fight against the denial of justice to the poor. In Amos, for example the setting of "justice and righteousness" (*mispat and sedaqa*) is the Court at the Gate (Amos 5:10-12). "Mispat means the judicial process of establishing in a case before the court what the right is (and therefore who is in the right), and rendering that opinion as the judgement of the court".⁶ The law behind the execution of justice is given in Deut 25:1. Accordingly, when the court vindicates the innocent successfully, then justice is done. This was particularly important in the case of

6. J. L. Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (OTL; London 1969) 92.

the weaker section of the society, the meek and the poor, who left without power or influence could not maintain themselves in the social order apart from the impartial justice of the court. In the days of the tribal league and judges the village assemblies and the courts at the gate were true centres of the execution of mispat. But as monarchy grew strong, and the power of the commercial class increased, the village courts became corrupt and justice was denied to the poor, the widow and the orphan. As Amos observes, justice was turned into wormwood and righteousness was cast down to the earth (Amos 5:7). In such a society where the centres of truth and justice were perverted, the prophet draws the picture of an ideal king who judges with righteousness and equity for the meek and poor of the earth.

It is important to note the expression "of the earth". His judgements and decisions reach beyond Israel to the ends of the earth. This means, a universal community is in the making, a community of universal proportions where righteousness and equity shall prevail. In such community the word of the king which is a participation in the creative and powerful Word of Yahweh takes the place of the sceptre of authority. When the king is ruling with the rod of his mouth, he needs no other girdle than righteousness and faithfulness.

The end result of the rule of one whose delight is in the fear of the Lord is that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (v.9). Knowledge of God is not an intellectual process or personal achievement, but the practical acknowledgement of God as one's Lord and Master and the implementation of the same in the society. The expression "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord", and the comparison "as waters cover the sea" refer to the universal acknowledgement of Yahweh as the Lord, and the universal nature of the community that shall be established thereby. Hab 2:14 also depicts the prophetic expectation and hope for a universal community using similar words. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea".

Having described the nature of the universal community to be established in terms of primordial peace and harmony in Is 11:6-9 the prophet states in v.10: In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall all the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious." "In that day" refers to the time when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God. In other words it points to the time of the gathering of the nations of the world into a

universal community. At that time the Davidic king, the messianic ruler shall be rallying point and supreme leader of the nations. That time shall also be marked by the final restoration of the remnant from all parts of the world: from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Ethiopia, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea, who shall be partakers of the universal community. The rest of the chapter describes the ways of the homecoming of Israelite from the four corners of the earth, and also envisages the restoration of the inner unity of the community. Is 65:25 and Is 11:9 present the holy mountain of the Lord as the place of real tranquillity and peaceful co-existence: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain." Is 2:2-5 and Mic 4:1-5 (See also Is 56:7; 57:13) also have the theme of the holy mountain treated using almost identical words. Both the latter texts begin by speaking about a mountain that shall be raised above all mountains. The house of the Lord is on this mountain. The verbal forms used in the description of the mountain (v.2a) seem to emphasize the immovability of this mountain which is established high above other mountains. This mountain is presented as the centre of the kingdom where the word of God resides, and from where it goes forth. Vv.2b-4 describe how the nations of the world flow to the mountain of the Lord. As contrary to v.2a, vv.2b-4 are dominated by different types of verbs. First there are the verbs of motion: "nations shall flow", "peoples shall come", "come, let us go up". These verbs describe a pilgrimage, or a gathering of all nations and peoples into the dwelling place of Yahweh. The universal character of the gathering is manifest in the expressions "the nations shall flow" and "many peoples shall come". It is worthy of special attention that this pilgrimage is not to fulfil an annual ritual of the Israelites as is the case in other pilgrimages. What the nations shall find on the holy mountain is the Word and the Law which signify the will of God in society. The other verbs used, viz., "that we may walk", "the law shall go forth", "beat the swords into ploughshares", "shall not lift up sword", "neither shall they learn war", "come, let us walk" etc. describe the effects of the pilgrimage. As a result of the coming together of nations and peoples on the holy mountain of God the people undergo a radical change. The instruments of battle are reshaped and converted into ploughshares and pruning hooks. An active attitude and positive action for peace is thereby meant. A total change from the atmosphere of violence and blood-shed into that of peace and harmony is envisaged. The other verbs used are "teach", "Judge", and "decide" all of which refer to the action of God which brought about the change in the community.

Ezek 17:22-24 also takes up the theme of the "high and lofty mountain", in a slightly different way. But the universal dimensions and the peace and harmony of the new community are well depicted in the text. Here we have the picture of Yahweh who will take a spring from the lofty top of the cedar and will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and will plant upon the mountain height of Israel. This cedar will grow into a noble tree and under it shall dwell all kinds of beasts, and in the shade of its branches birds of every kind shall build nests.

Is 66:18-24

These are the concluding words of the Book of Isaiah which explicitly take up the theme of gathering together of nations and bringing together of all believing brethren from all parts of the world: 'For I know their works and their thoughts, and am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see my glory... From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord' (vv.18:23). The eschatological vision of new heaven and new earth is repeated. The Lord himself shall appear and gather together all nations and language groups. This ingathering shall be preceded by the sending out of missionaries to the gentile nations, the emissaries being the Jews from the homeland or the diaspora. They shall be brought together to Jerusalem, the holy Mountain of the Lord just as the people of Israel brought cereal offerings to the Lord in clean vessels. One is reminded of the vision of Is 2:2-3 as coming true. What is stated in v.21 seems very radical in the background of the strict and rigid laws regarding racial purity of the community and priesthood reserved only to Levites. "And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the Lord" (v.21). "Some of them" means from the diaspora and the believers that come from everywhere. What we see here is the abrogation of ritual laws by prophetic authority. The temple, instead of being a place where privileged priests perform sacrifices, will become "a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is 56:7).⁷ The membership in the new community is open to all. The people called together from all nations and from the corners of the earth are really just as much a part of the chosen people as are the Jews. In the new universal community which is the dream of the prophet nothing shall be reserved for particular groups. Even the admission to the innermost areas of the temple, to the holy of holies, which was the strict prerogative of descent, is open to the "pagans."⁸

7. J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34:66* (WBC 25; Waco: Texas) 365.

8. C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40:66: A Commentary* (OTL; 1969) 426.

Conclusion

In the foregoing pages we have made an attempt to have a closer look at certain prophetic texts, especially Is 42:1-4; 45:18-25; 49:1-6; 55:1-5; 56:1-8; 58:1-12; 65:25 and 66:18-23. We have also looked into some other related texts like Is 2:2-3; 9:1-7; 11:1-9; Ezek 17:22-24; Hab 2:14 and Mic 4:1-5. We have made the study in the general background of the problems and tensions in the exilic and post-exilic Jewish community, especially setting it against the trends in the post-exilic community of rigid nationalism and racial exclusion. Though some of the texts we saw are often interpreted as referring to an immediate future, we find in them elements of the prophetic expectation for a new society, a new world, a new creation. The prophetic expectation and hope of salvation naturally assumed an eschatological dimension especially after the exile. The disappointment of the hope of a renewed Israel and of a more just international and social order added to the transcendental and eschatological character of the prophetic dreams. Therefore, it was quite natural that the hope for a new world took different forms,⁹ a) the re-establishment of the peaceful co-existence of paradise (Is 11:1-9; 65:25; Hab 2:14), b) the creation of a new political world order where Israel would become a light to the nations and all the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God (Is 49:1-6; 11:9), and c) the dawn of a new heaven and a new earth where all flesh shall come together to worship Yahweh on the Holy Mountain (Is 56:1-8; 66:18-23).

Standing at this point of history when we are celebrating the Great Jubilee 2000, it is our right and duty to dream like the prophets regarding the dawn of a new heaven and a new earth. And if the prophetic dream comes true let us not be surprised if the great hall of the Messianic Banquet is filled with "the tax collectors and the harlots" (Mt 21:31), "the poor and maimed and blind and lame" gathered from the streets and lanes of the city, from the highways and hedges (Lk 14:21-24).

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9. A Richardson, "Salvation", *IDB* IV, 174

"To All Nations" : Universalism in Matthew

Paddy Meagher

This contribution is a study on the universalism in the Gospel according to Matthew. Universality is the thematic thread running through the Matthean understanding of Jesus as manifested in the limitless mission of Jesus and the church. Such a mission demands the attitudes of inclusiveness, dialogue and participation.

Introduction

I wish to approach this subject as a search. To what extent does the various expressions of "all" in the Gospel of Matthew open the reader to dialogue rather than to monologue, to co-operation with others rather than competing with others, to participation rather than going it alone. Looked at from another angle we can ask whether the all embracing nature of the meaning of Jesus Christ leads us down a path to exclusivism or demands that we travel down a road which seeks a greater and greater inclusive manner of being Christian as community and persons. Does the "all" demand that we cancel, replace, absorb the "other" or that we dialogue with and be enriched by the "other?" Does the endless horizons opened up in Matthew's Gospel uncover for us a hidden face of God and broaden our understanding of the human community and the meaning of human life and lead us to dialogue?

Universality as the Frame of the Narrative in Matthew

I shall concentrate on the Gospel of Matthew. One thread, if not the more central thread, running through Matthew's understanding of Jesus is universality.¹ There is the limitless scope of the

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1. Throughout the essay when referring to what "Jesus" said/did I mean the manner in which Matthew has interpreted Jesus' ministry in the light of his Historical life his death and resurrection and way this has been interpreted in tradition prior to Matthew. I presume readers are familiar with the distinction between what a text says and what a text means or signifies based on the nature of the "How" the text communicates (literary genre/form)

responsibility entrusted to him by the Father and the validity of his teaching for all times and all peoples. The framework of his ministry is created by two significant texts. The first is very particular and yet expansive. Commenting on Jesus' withdrawal to Galilee and making his home in Capernaum in place of Nazareth (4:12-13) Matthew cites Is 9:1-2. He draws the horizons and underlines the purpose of his public life:

Land of Zebulum, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned (4:15-16).

It is within this background that Jesus proclaimed "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near (4:17).

The second text is cosmic in its expansiveness. The Gospel ends with the figure of Jesus enthroned by God as sovereign, spanning all time people and history. Coming out of the mystery of God (transcendence) he says to the Eleven Disciples:

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the ages (28:1 8-20).

Attention ought to be paid to the journey of obedience made by Jesus in order receive this gift from the Father. There were no short cuts like that offered at the outset of the narrative of his ministry. The devil offered him universal lordship with this offer, "all these (the kingdoms of the world and their splendor) I will give to you, if you will fall down and worship me" (4:9).

Universality and the Ministry of the Messiah

The scope of his ministry is again symbolized in the special frame provided to Matthew's description of Jesus ministry as messianic teacher and the one who embodies God's recreative power in his actions (5:1-9:34). Before he launches on his ministry Matthew creates a magnificent background scene. He writes:

Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan (4:23-25).

After presenting the collection of wide ranging teaching (5:1-7:28) and Jesus' recreative action among the poor, broken and sick (8:1-9:34), Matthew concludes this narrative and builds a bridge to the responsibilities entrusted to the believing community (Ch 10). He writes:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every, sickness (9:35 see 4:23).

We turn now to the scope of mission as it appears in some scenes of the narrative.

Limitless Scope of Mission - Tragic Texts

Matthew 2:1-12

We shall begin with the tragic aspect of the all embracing responsibility and significance of Jesus. We can approach this from a number of texts. The first occurs before even the ministry has begun. Jesus re-enacts the classic narrative of Israel's rejection and attempts on Moses' life in the symbolic narrative of the attempt by Herod to kill him and his exile in Egypt. However the exile in Egypt serves the narrator's desire to highlight that Jesus is "my Son" (2:15). The genealogy had stated that Jesus gathers together and brings to its climax all the deepest yearnings of the complex story of Israel and of God's fidelity and purpose in saving history. He is the Messiah (1:1. 16.17.18) The words of Matthew's angel re-enforces this fact interpreting the name, *Jesus* in terms of "he will save his people from their sins" (2:21) and the extra ordinary nature of his origin as the fulfillment of God's promise. He is the sacrament of God's presence since his other name is *Emmanuel*, "God is with us"

(1:23). Yet Israel represented by Herod rejects the Messiah, king of the Jews (2:2.4). In this context the wise men do not symbolize the rejection of Israel but the journey of the nations to the Messiah of God and the universal scope of God's plan for humanity.

Matthew 8:5-13

Jewish rejection of the Messiah in the person of Jesus foreshadowed by Herod and the openness to the much larger world is a tragic theme that recurs in Matthew's narrative. In the context of the extra ordinary faith of the Centurion, Jesus forcefully affirms, "Truly I tell you in no one (not even) in Israel have I found such faith (8:10). The narrator takes this opportunity to report a saying, which opens up the boundaries of the kingdom of heaven to all. Jesus is reported saying:

I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (8: 11)

and this inclusion is paired with haunting words of exclusion. He continues,

while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (8:12).

Matthew 12:15-21

Within the extended narrative of the mostly negative responses to Jesus' ministry (1 1: 1- 12:50) we find another tragic text. After two scenes of conflicts (the eating of grain and healing on the Sabbath [12:1-14] the narrator reports that "the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him" (12:14). Jesus withdraws and heals all who came to him, cautioning them "not to make him known" (12:15-16). Matthew interprets this tense moment in his ministry by his re-reading of words of Isaiah (Is 42:1-4) in which the purpose of ministry is summarized in terms of "proclaim justice to the Gentiles" and "in his name the Gentiles will hope" (12:18. 21).

Matthew 21:33-46

This tension comes to a climax when Jesus enters Jerusalem as 'the messianic healer-king'² (21:5.9.14.15) and prophet (21:11) who

2. The phrase is taken from the commentary in the Harper Collins Study Bible, on Matthew 21:9 [1895].

exercises prophetic authority in the temple (21:12-17). In reply to the angry question about authority, Jesus questions them about the origin of John's ministry and they refuse to commit themselves. Therefore he tells two parables in which the leadership by their responses condemn themselves. In the first story of the two sons they recognize the virtue of the initially recalcitrant son whom they fail to imitate. Jesus draws the conclusion that "the tax collectors and prostitutes are going in to the kingdom of heaven ahead of the leaders" (you - 21:31). In the second illustrative story about the vineyard workers who murder the owner's son, Jesus asks his audience what the owner ought to do. They reply that "he will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce of the harvest" (21:41). Commenting on this Matthew's Jesus draws the tragic conclusion: "Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the Kingdom" (21:43). A similar parable describes the refusal by the specially invited guests to attend the king's wedding banquet, their tragic fate, their city's and the inclusion of all on the streets (22:1 -10).

These texts which explicitly broaden the scope of the Kingdom of God to include the Gentile world are set in contexts of judgement and apparent exclusion of the Jewish people or at least their leadership. The climax of this tragic thread in the narrative is the horrifying cry at the climax of the trial scene before Pilate who states, "I am innocent of this man's blood; See to it yourselves" (27:24). At this point *the people as a whole* answered, "his blood be upon us and on our children" (27:25).

Exclusion of Israel ?

We must be careful not to interpret these texts as statements about the exclusion of the Jewish people from the scope of "all nations" for whom the kingdom of heaven has come. We need to look at two features of this Gospel. The first is the restriction on the itinerant preaching by the Twelve, sent exclusively to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6; cf. 9:36; 15: 24). This highlights a theme of the narrative dynamic of the Gospel, namely Jesus' fidelity to his own people and yet their rejection of him as Messiah and King of the Jews. His people cannot argue that he rejected them or that

he did not give them an adequate opportunity to recognize and accept him as Messiah.

Secondly, the Jewish rejection of Jesus is only a case of a major issue found in a series of texts, which take up the rejection of Jesus or his teaching and ministry both in the period of his ministry and in the life of the early Church. In some narratives and parables we find symbolic expression of totality and division at judgment based on various types of criteria. I will just list some. While the infants are recipients of God's revelation, the wise and intelligent are excluded (11:25-26). The righteous enter the kingdom while evildoers and the lawless are excluded in the explanations attached to the parables of weeds and net (13:36-43 and 49-50). Many sit at the banquet but the poorly dressed person is thrown out (22:121-14). The fate of the wicked house manager is so different from the faithful one, only six bridesmaids enjoy the marriage, and two slaves are enriched while one is thrown into outer darkness with nothing (24:45-25:30). What a cosmic description ends Matthew's narrative with goats separated from sheep and "these will go away into eternal punishment and the righteous into eternal life" (25:46)!

Universality of Mission

We wish first of all to look at the scenes with which Jesus' public life opens and concludes. We recall at this point the importance of the distinction between *what a text says* (literal meaning) and *what a text means* (symbolic meaning) and the necessity to pay attention to the literary form used in narrative communication. We cannot develop this point.

*The Canvas on which the Narrative is written 3:1- 4:16.*³

There are a series of scenes that together create the canvas for the reading of the narrative of ministry. We must pay attention to the elements in the description of the ascetic prophetic figure, John the Baptist. His ministry is clarified by means of Isaian promises, summarized it in terms of the coming kingdom and the call to repentance and colored with such vivid images of judgement. These

3 This section of the narrative and the Origin Narrative (11-2:23) are often interpreted in such a literal and historical manner that the real scope of the symbolic narratives and the purpose of the Narrator are either lost or only a shadow of the import of the section is grasped.

create the sense of the "end times" (eschatology) and the coming of God's reign. However, this is only the background for the "mightier than I" whose initiating rites and re-creative actions belong to the culmination of God's purpose, which John describes in terms of the Holy Spirit and fire. Add to this is the picture of the ultimate judge of human history as the farmer with his winnowing fork (3:11-12).

Within this background Matthew's Jesus declares the fundamental orientation of his life - "to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15 - to love God with his whole being by searching for and doing his will). Keeping in focus the atmosphere the mission of John creates, these words serve as the immediate background to the manner the Father (of Matthew) enters human history in a conclusive manner. He sketches the mission of Jesus within the contours of the responsibilities of the ultimate and promised mediator of God's action with this solemn declaration, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" (3:16-17).

Only in this full context are we able to grasp the cosmic import of the testing narrative. On one side we have the devil/Satan with authority over "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory - his kingdom" (4:8-9; 12:26). On the other is the Son of God whom the Father has entrusted with the cosmic and final responsibility for the human family. The Son also symbolizes Israel who had been entrusted with a universal mission by God in and through the Exodus. Throughout her history Israel had failed, a failure symbolized by her repeated sinfulness in the wilderness journey. The Son by his unwavering obedience in the wilderness over forty days cancelled this story of infidelity and undertook the great work of God in total obedience. The cosmic conflict between two kingdoms, between evil and good is played out in this narrative. Jesus emerges as the authentic Son who in a way has already conquered the power of evil and become the Son of God in power. The rest of the narrative is the living out of this inner reality in a journey of fidelity, compassion, love and faith. Therefore Matthew can sketch the universality of Jesus' responsibilities in the interpretation he makes of his shift from Nazareth to Capernaum and the summary of his initial proclamation of repentance and the presence of the kingdom of heaven (4:12-16.17).

Universality and the Death and Resurrection

We move from the opening to the closing events in Jesus' ministry. We could search for the implications of a number of sayings and

scenes as they have been arranged by our narrator to bring to awareness the universal significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. One text is couched in the apocalyptic imagery of the coming of the Son of Man.

Then the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (24:30-31).

This text is to be read with Jesus' reply to the High Priest at his trial as to "whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (26:63). He answers

From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven (26:64).

These two texts echo at least Daniel 7:13-14, which lies behind the magnificent scene with which the Gospel ends. Jesus as the Son of Man, the Son of God and Messiah (cf. 14:33 (christophany); 16:16 [confession]; 26:63; 28:19 [baptize in name of ...] and 2:15; 4:3.6; 8:29; 11:27; 27:40.43.54 [at Jesus' death]) has been given universal authority over all until the culmination of God's plan.

At Jesus' death and at the tomb Matthew uses the symbol of an earthquake. This symbol of God's special presence and power coupled with the split of the curtain in the Holy of Holies, the resurrection from the tombs of the bodies of the saints (27:51-53) and the angelic announcement that the crucified "has been raised from among the dead" proclaim a new world order. The centurion and his companions cap the whole scene of the death with their faith profession "Truly this man was God's Son!" (27:54). In Jewish thought the victory over death through being raised *within* the unfolding of history brings into history finality and culmination of human history which affects all.

The interpretation of his death by Jesus at the supper is also relevant. The words over the cup open up broad horizons. Jesus interprets the cup in these words:

Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the (new) covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom (26:27-29).

The universal overtones of the text are implied in the making of the covenant, the blood that is shed for all and for the forgiveness of sins (1:21). This sacred meal is also bound up with repentance and the presence of the Kingdom of heaven and the final coming of the Father's kingdom (4:12-16.17). We turn now to types of universality within the narrative.

Types of inclusiveness in Matthew

I wish to explore other types of inclusiveness beyond the "all nations/ Gentiles" type of texts which we considered at the beginning.

The Gracious, Compassionate and Merciful Father

There is an inclusiveness, which depends on the graciousness of God illustrated in the parable of the extravagantly generous landowner who is unjust in the eyes of some who are confronted with the question "are you envious because I am generous?" (20: 1-16). The inclusive purpose of God is also illustrated by the guests gathered from the streets for the banquet (22:8-10).

There is an inclusiveness, which flows from the Father's compassion and penchant for mercy and the Son's intimacy with the Father and his responsibility to make him known (11:27). Within this very context the "Son" is presented as divine wisdom calling "all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens" to experience that rest which he alone can give (11:28-30). The crowds with their various sickness, possessed by spirits, weighed down by religious traditions and ignorant like sheep without shepherds, come within the ambit of his compassion (9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34). Narratives of Jesus' table fellowship with groups excluded because of their sinfulness and impurity are also symbolic of the inclusiveness of his ministry and the kingdom of heaven (9:10-13). The root motive for this aspect of Jesus' ministry is the fact that "he knows the Father" (11:27). Therefore, Matthew's Jesus justifies his meals by re-reading Hosea, saying to his opponents "Go and learn what it means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice' "(9:13. 12:7). One of his sharpest criticisms of the

religious leaders was expressed in terms of their having “neglected the weightier matters of law: justice and mercy and faith” (23:23). Matthew shares with Luke the biting criticism made of Jesus, Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (11: 19). Yet he judges that Jesus way of living is the expression of divine wisdom (11: 19).

The Broken of Society and Universality

Related to this point are a series of texts, which are summaries and describe the types of people not only who crowd around Jesus but also to whom he responds. We shall refer to these below. We just note some texts here. A key text will form the frame for Matthew’s special narrative of Jesus’ messianic ministry. I shall quote this important text again.

So his fame spread throughout Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics, and he cured them (4:24)

In the middle of his ministry as Matthew prepares for the recognition of Jesus as Messiah and Son of the living God (16:16) he situates Jesus on a mountain with streams of people coming to him again. He writes:

Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, so that the crowd were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel (15:29-31).

There are a number of similar summaries (8:16; 9:35; 14:35-36; 19:1-2 and 21:14; we shall comment on 11:5-6 later). The priority that Jesus gives to the poor reflects the priority that God gives to the poor. This priority for the poor is the assurance and the clearest sign of God’s love for all and the universal scope of the ministry entrusted to Jesus as the Son who makes the Father known.⁴ We noted above that immediately after asserting his relationship to the Father, Jesus in Matthew’s narrative calls all who are weary and burdened to come. (11:27 and 11:28-30).

4 I have taken this idea from A. Durrand, O.P., “Relating to the Poor as a Constitutive Element of Faith”, *VJTR* 53 (1989) 611-19 especially 618-19.

Universality of Faith

There is an inclusiveness, which is based on faith, illustrated by the amazing faith of the non-Jewish figures of the Centurion and Canaanite woman. Both of these figures are outsiders. The Centurion recognized that he was unworthy that Jesus enters his house (8:8), while the woman did not hesitate to accept her identity among the "house dogs" and not the children (15:26-27). Faith also brought the diseased stricken woman, the disconsolate Jairus, the paralytic and the leper within the orbit of God's healing power mediated by Jesus (8:1-4; 9:2. 18. 22).

The Universal Nature of Jesus Teaching

We turn to another area of the Gospel. The key in this area is the way we understand the recurring phrase "the kingdom of heaven/ of God" with the sense of God's sovereign reign, which Matthew's Jesus uses 35 times with at least seven other references to the same reality. The phrase "proclaiming the kingdom of heaven" defines not only Jesus mission (4:17) but also John's mission (3:2) and the task entrusted to the Twelve as representatives of the community of believers (10:7). This task is reformulated in 24:14 and implied in the words of commendation to the woman who anointed Jesus feet (26:13). . The former text with its eschatological overtones ("until the end of time comes") deserves to be quoted in full:

And this good news (Gospel) of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.

This text can also be read with Jesus' initial description of his own mission, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (4.17). As the narrator indicates ("From that time on..." [4:17]) this text must be read along with the formulation of the universal character of his mission as a fulfillment of an Isaian promise:

*Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
on the road by the sea,
across the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles
the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
light has dawned (4:12-16; Is 9:1-2)*

The text 4:17 is a programmatic text and defines the scope of the great collection of messianic teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and its link to the kingdom (Chs 5-7). These chapters themselves are intimately linked with the coming of God's universal reign since they are enclosed consciously by Matthew within the frame created by the double reference to "preaching the Gospel (good news) of the Kingdom (4:23 and 9:35. cf. 24:14).

The great commission (28:20) does not use kingdom language yet no reference can be made to the sum total of Jesus' teaching without loud echoes of the closest link of all this teaching to the kingdom. His teaching not only makes the kingdom of God present in a dynamic way which calls for response (cf. many parables) but also spells out the way into the kingdom (5:3 and 10 which frame the Beatitudes; 5:19-20 which introduce 5:20-48); 7:21-23; 13:22. 38...)

The universal relevance and authority of Jesus' teaching are grounded, therefore, in a number of points. These include the universal nature of God's reign, the universality related to the Isaian vision of the future, the universality of God's purpose as Lord of heaven and earth and in Jesus' explicit command to teach the Gospel of the Kingdom to all nations. The ultimate ground is the relationship between Jesus, the Son and the Father. We quote the text, as it is a pivotal text in Matthew's narrative.

All things have been handed over to me by my Father; no one knows the Son except the Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (11:27).

Not only all things are entrusted to the Son by the Father, but the Son has that distinctive and unique quality of relationship and intimacy with the Father and also sees the full image of the human in the Father. His teaching has both a universal character and a quality, which makes it sui generis.

Universality and the Quality of Teaching

The universal pertinence, validity and reliability of Jesus' teaching must also be grounded in its quality. His teaching must open up horizons for human life, which are without limits and must plumb the depths of the potentials of human life. It must challenge and draw the human community and persons towards the richness of becoming again "the image and likeness of God".

Matthew's Jesus expressed this vision in terms of "being perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). Other expressions of the horizon of his teaching would be to "strive first (above all) for the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (6:33), "doing the will of the Father in heaven" (12:50 and 7:21; 18:14; 21:31 and 6:10). The love commandment would be a summary of the vision. We quote it as reading such a sacred text does make a difference and it is the epitome "of all law and prophets."

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: ' You shall love your neighbor as yourself (22:37-39).

If we look at some of the teaching we note the depths and limitless horizons opened up by their paradoxical and symbolic nature. The aim is to move from an eye, which sees this and an eye, which sees that to the third eye which sees the mystery of God and the human person (cf. 6:22).

We list some examples of the depths to which we are called. The manner of life of the disciples mirroring the Beatitudes is to be such that others see the Father reflected in their deeds (5:16). The adult must be empty of the self, becoming like a child (18:3). hands, feet and eyes are to be sacrificed rather than cause scandal (18:8-9). The most fragile in the Faith Community are to be revered as the Father cares for the most vulnerable (18: 10). Reconciliation is more valuable than any ritual (5:23-24). Forgiveness is to embrace the enemy and that from the heart (5:44; 18:35). The heart is an important symbol. Jesus is concerned with the quality of the human heart, which is the core of the personality and the source of external behaviour. In the heart genuine goodness and destructive evil are born. The heart can be far from God, the home of lust, a slave to money, the source of all types of evil (5:28; 6:21; 15:7; 12:34; 15:18-20). Jesus places before his disciple the image of single and undivided heart (5: 8 - "pure in heart"). The rather frequent use of the term "hypocrites" indicates his concern for genuineness (6:1-18; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13-15).

I say to you... A Problem in Jesus' Teaching.

The use of this phrase by Matthew's Jesus could give the

impression that he is replacing the teaching he and his people have inherited from the great teachers and especially from "Moses" in the Law (5:20-49). However, Matthew himself takes up this problem. The introduction which gives the key to read the first part of the Sermon begins in these terms: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill them" (5:17). In his teaching Jesus belongs to a prophetic tradition recognized by Jews through out history. He is able to break open the authentic meaning of God's law.

Prayer as a sure Guide - The Our Father

We shall not develop this point at any length. We draw attention to the three initial petitions of the disciples' prayer. These key petitions "Hallowed be your name", "Your Kingdom come" and "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" remind us of God's sovereignty over the whole creation and human history. They remind us that Jesus continuously interprets himself and his mission in relation to the sovereign initiative and action of God the Father. They prevent us from taking the initiative from God and giving it to Jesus, to the community of believers or to any person. Since God is at the beginning, sovereign of the process and the goal of all participation in his great plan, we are forced to acknowledge the universality and inclusiveness of all mission.

A Danger in Universality of Mission

The universality of Christ and the mission entrusted to the community of disciples has the danger of losing its focus. The roots of universality as we have said are the resurrection of Jesus and the significance of the kingdom of God. To preserve the focus which dominates Jesus' own ministry we need to return from "all authority in heaven and earth given to me..." to John's question. This question is posed after the programmatic story of Jesus' teaching and re-creative actions have been recounted (Chs 5-9) and its continuation in the ministry by his disciples (Ch 10). The narrator explicitly describes this whole section in terms of "what the Messiah was doing" (11:1). John asks "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (11:3). In Jesus' answer we find that focus which ensures that the universality of the Son's authority, the mission of making

disciples of all nations and living as disciples retain the essential character of Jesus' ministry and the core traits of the Kingdom of God. Jesus responds:

Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news brought to them" (11:4-5).

The magnificent cosmic scene of universality with which the Gospel closes is also tempered by or to be re-read along with the scenes in which Jesus handles rejection and failure (25:31-46). The Father has handed over all things to the Son who shares unparalleled intimacy with the Father (11:27). He remains with all his cosmic authority "gentle and humble of heart". He invites all who are "weary and are carrying heavy burdens to come and experience rest. Disciples, who live all that Jesus has commanded bring rest to those burdened. His yoke and "all that I have commanded you" finds its authentic interpretation in the service of the hungry, thirsty, homeless, imprisoned and such groups of our society today (25:35-36). To be universal Jesus ministered to the least. The community of disciples and each disciple is a disciple of the universal Lord in ministry to the least.

Universality and Uniqueness demand Inclusiveness, Dialogue, Participation

We return to our initial questions. At times the universality of Christ's mission, the unique character of the saving act of Jesus Christ, the limitless authority gifted to the Son are interpreted in negating ways. They are made to imply exclusivity, the displacement and replacement of prior religious traditions and mediations. There is a tendency to depreciate, undervalue, make light of.. if not disparage, cheapen and denigrate other great and small religious traditions.

The key in Matthew as in all the writers of the New Testament is to keep the perspective of the relationship of Jesus Christ and the Spirit to the Father. The Kingdom is the affirmation of the universal purpose of God - Father and his sovereignty. Jesus is identified as the Son in various texts and his mission flows from the Father, a mission which has a character which is genuinely unique as the term "Son" symbolizes. The intimacy with the Father enables him to reveal

the Father in an exhaustive manner. His mission must be universal like the Father's plan. The Son is the authentic Son because of his total love for the Father (obedience) and total love for the human family of the Father. The great commandment expresses the essence of God and his will (22:34-40). Jesus' death is the culminating moment of his love. The Father expresses the mutual nature of their relationship in raising Jesus from among the dead and giving him all authority. Jesus' resurrection assures us of the universal scope and responsibility entrusted to the Son. The scope of his mission and the continuation of this mission is universal. His teaching is authoritative for all.

Matthew like other authors in the NT and more obviously with the numerous "formula quotations" interprets Jesus within his rich Jewish tradition. Can we conclude that this religious tradition is the only tradition within which God has been present and bringing about the kingdom. Surely the gift of Jesus Christ is an assurance of how committed God is to the coming of his Kingdom. This would mean that those entrusted with the continuation of Jesus' mission will listen to God in other traditions, be open to be enriched by these and dialogue with them to recognize God's actions and allow Jesus' teachings to be enriched by the great teaching of other religious tradition.

The whole ministry of Jesus and all the primary interpretations of Jesus, his mission and teaching are conditioned and severely limited by the culture of the Jewish people. To be intelligible he had to be interpreted within this cultural matrix, yet it was limited. This means that the intelligibility of Jesus and his teaching need to be reinterpreted within other cultures. To do this adequately dialogue with other religions rooted in their specific cultures is essential.

The purpose of Jesus mission is the coming of the reign of God within our history. To do this adequately the community of believers need to participate in all the great movements of a political, social and economic nature initiated and undertaken by women and men of all religions and humanist visions.

History and various cultures have molded the Community of Faith (Church) and all its rich and complex belief systems. It is only in genuine dialogue with other cultures and religions that the Community learns how to give transparent and intelligible witness to the Father

and Jesus Christ and so be able to make disciples everywhere. The universal mission of the community of Faith has the primary responsibility to participate in the Father's creation of the kingdom through Jesus Christ among all peoples. This demands a fundamental attitude of inclusiveness, of dialogue, of participation and religious and cultural witness rooted within the history, religion, culture and commitments of other people who are also seeking within their own traditions the coming of the Kingdom. Men and women of all cultures and religions can be enriched by the teaching of Jesus Christ and grow to greater maturity as disciples of the reign of God. People of various religions and cultures can enable Jesus' disciples to understand the gift of God in Jesus Christ. All will not wish to enter into that historical community known as the Christian Churches. However, this is neither the will of God nor humanly possible as history at least teaches us.

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"From East and West, From North and South"

Lukan View of Universalism

Augustine Mulloor

The presentation of Jesus and the church by Luke through the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles cannot be understood but in terms of the formation of the new global, universal community. The reading of Lukan works from this angle challenges the church of today to use universalist language and to live radically the attitude of universalism.

Introduction

Jesus' reaction to the frontier violations in Palestine through the exploitative presence and activities of Roman colonial lords is a teaching par excellence and an example, without parallel, of the frontier transcendence leading to communion and life. As against the possibility of communalism and fanaticism Jesus opted for inclusive vision and universal love; as against the possibility of violence, Jesus opted for radical reconciliation; as against the possibility of escapism, Jesus opted for realistic and conscious counter-living in the actual situation, giving shape to an open community.

In this short reflection we shall decode the language used by the Evangelist Luke to reinterpret this attitude and message of Jesus, through his double-volume work: the Gospel and the Acts. The characteristic mark of universalism is presented by Luke both by bringing new traditions from his special sources and by reinterpreting the common traditions through his literary and theological interventions.

Paradoxically, our time has been characterized by the oft-repeated slogan of a global village transcending all the boundaries and yet, it has witnessed more than ever to the creation of so many new frontiers, in increasing number and kind and size. The church which is supposed to be the medium for facilitating the abolition of frontiers and for the promotion of justice, unity and communion through its

sacramentality, has contributed, in contrast with its own nature, towards making and strengthening the boundaries. Hence the highest relevance to returning to the spirit of the Gospel in view of identifying the biblical perspectives of universalism.

1. "That all mankind shall see..." (Lk 3:6; Acts 28:28)

Lukan vision of universalism is crystallized in an inclusion created through the citation of and allusion to Is 40:5, almost at the beginning and at the end of the two-volume work: Lk 3:6; Acts 28:28.

Lk 3:6 is part of the introductory section of the Gospel with infancy narratives and the narration of events preparatory to the ministry of Jesus. The ministry of John the Baptist is introduced through the traditional material (Mk 1:2-3), namely, the citation of Is 40:3. When Mark and Matthew cite only Is 40:3, Luke cites the quotation in its complete form, i.e. Is 40:3-5. Now the fifth verse is theologically important for Lk to articulate the universalist dimension of the mission of Jesus.

Although it is an introduction to the ministry of John the Baptist it forms an overture to the mission of Jesus as the definitive new exodus. Lk omitted Is 40:5a which reads: "then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed". Exodus was the definitive event of salvation in which God's glory was manifested at the crossing of the red sea (Ex 14:17), in the manna (Ex 16:10) and on Sinai (Ex 19)¹. Now the presence of Jesus is the presence of God in all glory. The glory of God in Jesus is experienced by all the living beings. Hence the theophany in Jesus transcends all limitations and is open to all. An allusion to Is 40:5 is found also in Lk 2:29-32.²

When Lk ends his work in Acts 28:28 openness of the horizon of God's glory is once again revealed in the allusion to Is 40:5. This is the last sentence uttered by Paul who is under house arrest in Rome. He is addressing the local leaders of the Jews, making it clear to them why and how God has opened the salvation to all peoples. The

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1. L.A. Schokel & J.L. Sicre Diaz, *I Profeti*, Roma, 1980, Pp. 310-311; C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, London, 1969, Pp. 38-39; J. Navone, *Themes of St. Luke*, Rome, Pp. 185f.
 2. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*, New York, London, 1983, P. 460.

hardheartedness of the Jews and their rejection of God's offer of salvation are presented in Is 6:9-10. This citation is concluded by Paul with the allusion to Is 40:5: "let it be known to you, then, that this salvation of God has been sent to the gentiles: they will listen" (Acts 28:28).

By the salvation of God, Paul is referring to the revelation and realization of God's salvific plan in Jesus Christ. So the target is not reached yet. The journey continues and hence only an open conclusion is possible.

Within this frame of the universalist vision, we shall now locate the particular texts in Lk and Acts through which the Evangelist reveals the various dimensions of the vision.

2. "...Good News for all the People" (Lk 2:10)

The introductory section of the Gospel according to Luke includes a proemium (1:1-4), infancy narratives (1:5-2,52) and events connected with the preparation for the ministry of Jesus (3:1-4,44). All these narrations have the function of foreshadowing the actual narration of the events in the Gospel³. To our theme two texts are relevant: 2:10 and 2:29-32.

An angel of the Lord announces the birth of Jesus to shepherds. The announcement of the message has traditional elements like: the appearance of an angel, the fear of shepherds, reassurance through words "do not be afraid", and a sign of reassurance⁴. The message is introduced through the words: "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people".

The verb *euangelizomai*⁵ is used in the introductory section in 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:16-20. 1:19 and 3:18 are connected with the person of John the Baptist. The angel announces the birth of John as a good news. John's ministry is summarised by the Evangelist as the proclamation of the good news. The subject of John's proclamation is the one who is to come after him. Hence the good news is concerned

3. O.F. Fearghail, *The introduction to Luke-Acts. A study of the role of Lk 1:1-4,44 in the composition of Luke's two volume work*, (Dissertation) Rome, 1987.

4. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, P. 396.

5. *ibid*, P. 397.

about Jesus. Lk 2:10 is directly about Jesus. Lk 4:16-20 is the citation from Isaiah and its application to the mission of Jesus in the Nazareth episode. In conclusion we can say that the verb *euangelizomai* directly implies the person and mission of Jesus.

In 2:10 the verb is qualified by the expression "for all the people" (*panti to lao*). See how it contrasts with Lk 2:1: "In those days a decree went out from emperor Augustus that 'all the world' (*pasan ten oikoumenen*) should be registered".⁶ As against the announcement of the emperor is the announcement of God. God announces the good news that brings salvation and peace, the good news that God reigns,⁷ and not the emperor. God's reign embraces all the people. This good news is Jesus himself. He is the "today" (*semeron*) (4:21; 19:5-9; 23:43) of salvation that demands an urgent decision from the part of the whole world. He is significant and decisively so for the whole world.

3. "In the presence of all the peoples" (Lk 2:29-32)

When Jesus is brought to the temple to be offered, the Evangelist reveals His crucial significance through the hymn and oracle in the mouth of Simeon. Simeon together with Anna represents all the messianic expectations of Israel. In Lukan vision they are the last characters of the OT history. The presence of Jesus in the temple is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Mal 3:1 according to which "... the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come into the temple". The coming of the Lord into the temple will be the manifestation of the fullness of the glory of the temple. This oracle was given in the context of the rebuilding of the temple after exile. Then, this is interpreted as the prophecy about the definite intervention of God. So Simeon recognizes in Jesus the realization of that prophecy, that is the presence of salvation according to the promise. Now, this salvation is not oriented to the people of election alone. It is prepared "in the presence of all peoples" as the "light for revelation to the gentiles".

"Salvation"⁸ alludes to Is 40:5. Lk is reinterpreting that text in relation to Jesus. At the background there is also Is 52:10 which speaks of the

6. N. Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, Michigan, 1979, P. 111.

7. Cfr. Is 40: 6-10; 42:27; 52:7; 61:1f.

8. J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, P. 222; J. Navone, *Themes of St. Luke*, Pp. 141f.

servant of Yahweh as "the Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." Second part of the Lukan text is from Is 49: 6 which is another song about the servant of Yahweh⁹. Light is the basic symbol of God and salvation. So the presence of God in Jesus is the light that spreads to all without any distinction. The prophecies about the servant of Yahweh are fulfilled in Jesus.

4. Galilean Ministry (Lk 5:1-9,50)

Already in the declaration of the manifesto or policy in 4:16 f. the openness of Jesus to the gentiles is very clear. Quoting two biblical narrations of salvation history - the story of the widow of Sarephath favoured by prophet Elijah and of Naaman the syrian who was healed by Elisha - Jesus proves that God had already opened his salvation to the gentiles. This universalist dimension is brought to focus in the radical expressions of Jesus' option for the poor and the marginalized during his ministry starting with the call of the disciples in 5:1-11.

The picture of the new and global community is crystallized in the teaching of Jesus in Lk 6:1-36. The section opens with the sabbath controversy because Jesus violated the sabbath tradition in order to do the will of God (6:1-10). This led to stark opposition (6:11). In this context Jesus is reported to have gone up the hill to pray. He spent the whole night in prayer. As he comes down the mountain, he elects the twelve and with them stands on the level ground (6:17). There he heals, offers blessing on the poor, the hungry, the mourning and the persecuted. He is not afraid to raise his voice against injustice by pronouncing curses on those who are rich, who laugh, are satisfied and well-spoken of. Finally, Jesus proclaims the new community which is an inclusive community. In his option for the poor and the sick as against the rich and the proud, Jesus was not dividing the society into two sections or "classes" in view of polarising them against each other. In his vision the new community consists of both the rich and the poor, the persecutor and the persecuted, the satisfied and the hungry. From violent revolution a new society will not emerge but only the roles will shift from one class to the other. A lasting solution is possible only when the mentality of the rich is transformed in view of openness to the poor and willingness to share. This will bring about a revolutionary

9. J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, P. 428.

change in the society by which all will have responsibility for each other with their eyes open and with their insight into the meaning of life. Then it will be possible to love the enemies and pray for those who persecute. All are included in this community modelled after the mercy of God the Father: "be merciful as the heavenly Father is merciful" (6:36). The logic of the life-style of this community is simply the logic of reversal and subversion of the existing exploitative logic. This is articulated in the words: "love your enemies.... pray for those who persecute you...give without expecting to get back...." etc. It is ultimately based on the Fatherhood of God expressed in his mercy or unconditional and total self-giving. The universality has its basis in this mercy of the Father. Without this vertical unity, horizontal communion is not possible.

5. Journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19,28)

a. Jerusalem

For Luke Jerusalem is the place of salvation¹⁰. The Gospel narration begins and ends in the geographical context of Jerusalem (1:5; 24: 50-53). Jesus journeys to Jerusalem, not as an option, but as an inevitable part of the design of the Father, but most willingly and making a conscious decision ("set his face to go to Jerusalem") (9:51). In Jerusalem Jesus was "to be taken up" ("the days were fulfilled to be taken up") which means to suffer, to die and to be risen. The disciples have no choice but to follow the master and go to Jerusalem willingly and remain there until they are sent to the whole world (24:49). But this insistence of Luke on Jerusalem should be seen not merely from a Jewish point of view, i.e., as the centre of their religion, and the dwelling place of Yahweh but from a wider angle using the categories of universalism. It has, beyond the geographical meaning, a theological and symbolic meaning. In the teaching of the prophets about the messianic era, Sion or Jerusalem was presented as the place to which all the nations will make pilgrimage (Is 2:2f). It is on the mountain in Jerusalem that God will prepare a banquet for all the people (Is 25: 6f.). The temple of Jerusalem will become the place of prayer for all peoples (Is 56:7). So Jerusalem is the symbol of universality, the locus of encounter of and communion among all peoples under the reign of God.

10. J. Navone, *Themes of St. Luke*, Pp. 64f.

b. Samaritans

The role given to Samaritans in the Gospel according to Luke is extra-ordinary. In two narrations a Samaritan is placed as the main character (10:25-37; 17:11-18). In the parable of the good Samaritan (10:25-37) this character is presented as a person with an interiority that is manifestly different from that of the Levite and priest. He is unable to pass by the man on the road, whoever he may be. In fact his identity is not in any way, specified, purposely lest any special mark of his identity should be the motivating force behind his loving service. The Samaritan does not bother to know who this man is, where he comes from, to which race he belongs, to which religious tradition he clings to and what not. He takes upon him the responsibility for the man beyond all these considerations, even in view of the future of the man and his security. Thereby he transcended the cultic and ritualistic understanding of law and religion. He is the ideal type of the members of the new and universalist community envisaged by Jesus with an interiority that pushes him to act like an authentic neighbour to any person in any situation. He is an ideal disciple. Luke presents in this way the openness of Jesus to all without any distinction, beyond the structural walls of the "elect people". If a Samaritan can be an ideal disciple, then qualitatively faith has to be recognized beyond all frontiers.

In the narration of the healing of ten lepers (17:11-18) only a Samaritan recognizes the source of his healing in Jesus, praises God, returns to Jesus and worships him and thanks him. As against the other nine his nature is unique and his attitude is daring and glaringly different. There is something in his innermost being that prevents him from going his way and makes him turn back to Jesus. Jesus was teaching, then, that the Samaritan could transcend the boundaries, and that he could represent the new community that is open and universal.

c. Radical commensality

Luke has a special interest in the theme of banquet. Jesus participates in meals and banquets and in that context teaches about the heavenly banquet, that is, about the consummation aspect of the kingdom of God. Thereby, Jesus is reinterpreting the prophetic teachings like Is 25:6; 34:6; 55:1; 65:11; Zech 1:7 and Deut 12:4-7 etc.

Within the context of the eschatological meaning, banquets reveal the nature of the communion to be experienced in the end time. This is revealed through the nature of persons with whom Jesus eats and

drinks, where such meals are taking place, and how he is participating in the same, What Jesus practised can be characterized as radical table fellowship or commensality.

Jesus eats with tax collectors (5:29f.) and with sinners (15:2; 7:34). He eats also with pharisees (7:36f.) and accepts the hospitality even of women (8: 1-4; 10:38-41). He joins "all" in a meal (14:7. 12.15). For Jesus this fellowship includes all and makes no distinctions within that all-embracing community. This is one of the best expressions of the universality of the new community.¹¹

d. "From East and West, from North and South"

Chapter 14 of Luke has three traditions on the theme of banquet: 14:7-11; 12-14 and 15-24. These three teachings of Jesus are placed in the context of a meal. The first one is about not seeking honourable positions in an assembly to which you are invited. The honour is given by the host and not acquired or obtained by the guest. Hence this is about the behaviour of guests.

The second one teaches as to who should be invited to a banquet. Jesus says that invitations should be extended not to the rich neighbours but to "the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind". These are the outcasts and the marginalized ones. Hence the intended fellowship transcends the existing boundaries and is characterized as universalist.

The third one, that is, the parable of the banquet clearly reveals how God opened salvation to all when the invited guests - elected people of God - rejected the invitation. There are two stages in the process of this opening to all. The first command of the master, after knowing about the rejection by the invited guests is to "go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the "poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame". When he comes to know that there is still space left, he commands the servants to "go out into the roads and lanes and compell people to come in". The first one is a clear articulation of the option for the poor and the second one is the expression of perfect universality. Lk 16:16 is similar in content: "The

11. P. Farb & G. Armelagos, *Consuming Passion. The Anthropology of eating*, Boston, 1980; J. D. Crossan, *Jesus. A Revolutionary Biography*, San Francisco, 1994, Pp. 67-68; F. Lentzen-Deis (Gen. Editor), *The images of Jesus*, Bombay, 1989, Pp. 54-82.

law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed and *everyone* tries to enter it by force".

So the eschatological banquet is open to all. The radical commensality practised by Jesus is the focussed expression of the universal nature of the new community as is summarized in 13:29: "Then people will come from east and west, from north and south and will eat in the kingdom of God." It is the expression of egalitarian communion without vertical discriminations and lateral separations.¹²

e. The new Family

In chapter 15 through three parables Luke presents the image of the new community or family. The context of the parables is the accusation of the Jewish leaders against the radical fellowship of Jesus with tax collectors and sinners. The parables are the answer of Jesus. The lost sheep and the lost coin are symbols of the branded outcasts and labelled sinners who are received into the family. Consequently there is rejoicing in a communitarian level - the shepherd with his neighbours and friends, the woman with her neighbours and friends and God with the angels - over the finding of lost sheep or coin or return of the repentent sinner.

The parable of the prodigal son represents the communicative struggle and tension of authentic dialogue in the formation of the new family which is all-inclusive¹³. When the Father receives the younger son back, the reformatory process of the family has begun. It is the return of the son who opted for a life under a small, independent patron against the patronage of the Father. It is the dialectic between the decision in favour of a bounded and closed community and an open and frontierless community. The return of the son and his reception by the Father is the triumph of universality.

Only when the elder son is willing to go inside and get reconciled with the father and the younger brother, then only reformatory process can be complete. The elder son who refuses to accept the decision of the father represents a closed community. Radical and total universality

12. J. D. Crossan, *Jesus. A revolutionary Biography*, Pp. 67-68.

13. F. Lentzen-Deis (Gen. Editor), A. Mulloor (Regi. Editor), *Jesus in the exegetical reflections and community experience*, Delhi, 1997, Pp. 37-88.

is the aim of Jesus. Father represents that ideal. Hence he has to go out to invite the elder son so that the family may be fully reestablished. The universality is possible only when all admit and accordingly submit themselves to the patronage of the Father (God).

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16: 19-31) has the same message with new nuances. The mistake of the rich man is that he does not have an inclusive vision. He is totally immersed in himself. While sumptuously feasting every day he does not even think about the man in sores at his gate waiting to get at least the crumbs from the rich man's table. His vision is selfish and narrow. That he feasted every day shows that he became blind from utter selfishness. He can not see things clearly any more. He has built a wall around himself. Those outside the walls are practically non-existent for him. Jesus teaches that lack of universalist vision has radical eschatological consequences. The situation in heaven is a radical reversal of the earthly one. Hence the universalist attitude is not an either-or, but a must in the life of a disciple.

f. Mission of seventy

Luke alone has the tradition of the mission of the seventy. The number seventy is probably a round number¹⁴. But it could also have symbolic meaning in relation to "all nations"¹⁵. The restrictions for the mission are absent in Luke even in the first mission of the twelve. More universalist nature emerges in the mission of the seventy. The places to which the missionaries are asked to go probably refers to Transjordan, people of which were treated with such indifference by the Jewish leaders and were therefore much neglected spiritually¹⁶. So Jesus challenges them to see the truth that all are included in the kingdom of God.

6. "To all nations" (24:47)

Luke concludes the gospel with the instruction of the risen Jesus to the disciples. By opening their minds Jesus prepared them to

14. N. Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, P. 299.

15. The expression reflects the nations mentioned in Gen 10:2-31. cfr. J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV*, P. 846.

16. N. Geldenhuys. *The Gospel of Luke*, P. 299

understand and accept the universalist vision of salvation and its consequences in the actual life of the disciple. Then Jesus says, "and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem" (24:47). The mission is universal and the point of departure is Jerusalem. This is very similar to the Matthean formulation in Mt 28:16-20. It shows that the ultimate purpose of the divine revelation is to make the good tidings reach all the nations. The church, then, is a universalist movement.

7. Acts of the Apostles

Now we pass on to take note of the most important expressions of universalism in the Acts of the Apostles.

a. "To the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

Acts 1:8 is the summary of the whole book¹⁷. It is also the basis of the missionary nature of the church, namely the command of Jesus. It is a summary because the four places mentioned here - Jerusalem, the whole Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth - will be important hinges for the narration of the spread of the word of God and the growth of the church. Acts 1-7 describes the events in Jerusalem; the spread of the Gospel in Judea and Samaria is narrated in Acts 8; Acts 9 and the following chapters describe the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This synthesizes the movement of the church, from the geographical point of view, from Jerusalem to all the nations, from the particular boundaries to beyond the boundaries, in short, towards universalism in its perfect expression.

b. Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-47)

The pentecost is both the moment of the birth of the church in Lukan view and the point of departure for her mission. The universalist traits of the event are marked by two elements. The witnesses of the event are from "every nation under heaven" (2:5). "Each one heard them (apostles) speaking in the native language of each" (Acts 2:6)¹⁸. The Christ event is universal and the church is for all. Hence the language of the church should be inclusive and universal which has its source in the Spirit. The spirit is the very foundation of universalism and its perfect expression.

17. A. Mulloor, *Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. I, Kochi, 1995, P. 15.

18. E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Oxford, 1981, pp. 167f.

c. Samaritan Pentecost (Acts 8:4-17)

It is through Philip that the Good News reaches Samaria. Later, Peter and John go there and pray for the believers, imposing their hands on them. The result is the experience of a new pentecost. It was the outpouring of the Spirit in favour of the Samaritans, thus manifesting another dimension of the universality of the Christ event. The Spirit who is the source of universalism is open to Samaritans.

d. Gentile Pentecost (10:44-48)

The conversion of Cornelius is an overture to the gentile mission in its preparatory stage. Peter is taught by God to shatter the boundaries of his interiority and to enter into the new horizon of universal existence, through the vision. Peter can now say with conviction that "God knows no partiality" (10:34). Then in the house of Cornelius during the time of teaching, there is the outpouring of the Spirit on all who are gathered. The presence of the spirit is the presence of the universalist attitude and life.

e. Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)

The way the Jerusalem Council deals with the problem of the gentiles entering the church, is a concrete case of how universalism was the principle on the basis of which decisions were taken in the church. Peter says, ".....he (God) has made no distinctions between them (gentiles) and us (jews)" (15:9). The letter sent to the churches, is a confirmation of the universal mission of the church. James's words give witness to the same message: "... God first looked favourably on the gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name..." (15:14). Then he cites Am 9:11-12 to the same effect (Acts 15:16-17).

f. Conversion and mission of Paul (Acts 9:22. 26)

The conversion of Paul and his mission among the gentiles is a definitive turning point in the interpretation of universalism of Christ event. The purpose of the mission of Paul in relation to the gentiles is progressively clarified in the three narrations of his conversion. To Ananias God said, "... for he (Paul) is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (9:15). Ananias says to Paul: "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous one and to hear his voice for you will be his witness to all the world" (22: 14-15). Jesus says to Paul: "... I will rescue you from your people and from the

gentiles to whom I am sending you..." (26:17). The theological vision of Paul himself with regard to universalism of which he was convinced at heart is expressed in the letters.¹⁹ It is to the realization of this universalist dimension of the church that Paul is contributing through his teaching to the Jewish leaders of Rome, while he was under house arrest, with which the work of Luke is concluded; with an allusion to Is 40:5 so that "all flesh may see salvation" (Acts 28: 28).

Conclusion

In the vision of Luke Jesus, through his birth, his mission which consisted of radical teaching on the universal community and radical practice of fellowship with all especially with the marginalized ones and through his death and resurrection promoted the growth of the new community. The church continued the same vision. The church realized that its mission is to facilitate the emergence of such an open community under the Fatherhood of God. That the church of today may represent the same value of universalism, she is challenged to return to the original spirit of the Biblical models and paradigms. Are we willing to go so radical in our option for universalism? If we do not, have we any right to call ourselves His disciples and representatives of His values?

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19. Cfr. the article of J. Palliparambil in this issue itself.

"Gathering the Dispersed Children of God Into One" Johannine View of Universalism

George Mlakuzhyil

The Gospel according to John seems to contain a contradiction on account of the presence of both universalistic and exclusivistic statements. The article interprets this Johannine mystery by analysing the relationship between the word of God and the children of God in Jn 1:1-18, the universal mission of Jesus to give life to all and the unifying function of his death.

Introduction:

the problem of Exclusivism and Universalism

At the end of the second millennium people are caught between *two opposing tendencies*. On the one hand the whole world has become a *global village*, mainly because of the mass media and peoples' openness to *universal values*; and on the other hand there are *exclusivist* tendencies in many ethnic and national groups besides *fundamentalist* attitudes in many adherents of religion. Exclusivism and fundamentalism are often nurtured by vested interests through narrow interpretations of Sacred Scriptures. Authentic followers of Christian and other faiths living in pluri-religious contexts, as in India, are challenged by these two opposing tendencies.

Though it has been held for centuries that there is "no salvation outside the Church" (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), the Second Vatican Council has clearly stated that there are "rays of truth in other religions", that is, there is genuine divine revelation in other religions. If God has revealed Himself in and through them, God offers salvation to the people of different faiths through their own religion. This is supported both by the knowledge gained by contact with people of other faiths, and by the universalist views of salvation in the Prophets and other books of the Bible (cf. the other articles in this issue of *Jeevadhara*). It is to be admitted, however, that there are both universalist and exclusivist statements in the Bible, even in the New

Testament. For instance, Paul writes to the Romans: "God shows no partiality" (Rom 2:11) but Peter tells the Jews about the salvific role of Jesus Christ: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Sometimes the same NT author makes both universalist and exclusivist statements. For example, we read in 1 Tim 2:3-5: "God our Saviour... desires everyone to be saved... For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus".

The Gospel of John too seems to have the same ambiguity, for it contains apparently *universalist* and *exclusivist* statements. Some of the passages which stress universalism are the following:

The Word of God is "the true light that enlightens every human being" (1:9). Jesus is "the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5); he is "the Lamb of God who takes away sin of the world" (1:29); he is sent by God to save the world (3:17); he is proclaimed by the Samaritans as "the Saviour of the world" (4:42). Jesus himself says that when he is lifted up, he would "draw all" to himself (12:32). God's universal love for humankind is unambiguously affirmed: "Indeed, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (3:16). God is presented as the universal teacher of all human beings: "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God' " (6:45).

On the other hand, John seems to make some *exclusive claims* such as: "No one has ever seen God; [the] only Son/God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made [Him] known" (1:18). "The one who believes in him is not condemned; but the one who does not believe is condemned already, because s/he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (3:18). "The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; the one who disobeys the Son will not see life... (3:36; cf. also 1 Jn 5:12). Jesus himself says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6). Such Christological and soteriological statements seem to *exclude the followers of non-Christian religions from eternal life and communion with God*. Today this is offensive not only to the followers of other faiths but also to Christians themselves who live in a *multi-religious milieu*.

Today Indian Christians are aware that Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews and others believe in a loving God who has revealed Himself to them in and through their sages and *gurus*, prophets and Scriptures.

People of different faiths experience God's unconditional love in their lives and surrender themselves to the *God of life and love*. But the Fourth Gospel's conclusion states that *faith in Jesus Christ* is the *path to eternal life* (cf. 20:31; see also 1Jn 4:15).

The Johannine insistence on the necessity of faith in Christ for possessing eternal life poses *theological and hermeneutical problems* to the Christians of today, for they know that there are millions of *followers of other faiths* who *encounter the God of life*, though they do *not believe in Jesus Christ*. Hence how is one to interpret the apparently exclusivist Johannine statements in the light of the belief in universal salvation? A correct understanding of the relationship between the Word of God and "the children of God" in the Prologue, of the universal life-giving mission and ministry of the Johannine Jesus, and of the unifying function of his death can enlighten us in our search for a meaningful solution to these problems in the multi-religious context of today.

1. The Word of God and the Children of God in the Prologue (Jn 1: 1- 18)

The Prologue is a hymn to the *Logos*, the Word of God, which sets the theological tone to the whole Gospel of John. The hymn highlights the creative, revelatory and regenerative roles of the Word of God before and after the incarnation of the Word. The role of God's Word in empowering humans to become children of God is stated at the centre of the Prologue (1: 12-13). The personified 'Word' of God is found only in the Prologue and the expression "(the) children of God" (*[ta] tekna [tou] theou*) occurs only twice in the entire Gospel of John (1:12; 11:52).¹ The question arises as to whom the title "the children of God" refers in John's Gospel. Most of the Johannine scholars and commentators maintain that it designates Christians and only Christians.² This, however, seems to be an interpretation of Jn 1:12 and 11:52 based on the pre-Vatican understanding that "there is no salvation outside the

1. It occurs four times in the First Epistle of John (3:1-2.10; 5:2) This article will deal only with the Gospel of John because of lack of space. It is to be noted that the same terms have often different meanings or nuances in the Gospel and in the Epistles of John.

2. For example, Matthew Vellanicall, *The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johanne Writings*, (Analecta Biblica 72, Rome, 1977).

Church". This notion seems to have prevented many from seeing the universal revelatory- redemptive pattern presented in the Prologue and concretized in the ministry and death-resurrection of Jesus Christ. We shall therefore examine carefully God's universal plan of salvation highlighted in the Prologue, and the pattern of universal redemption in the life-death-resurrection of Jesus in the Johannine Gospel.

The Evangelist's flow of thought becomes clear if we examine the literary plan of the Prologue, which is constructed concentrically (a*b*c*b**a**).³

The Concentric Structure of the Prologue (1:1-18)

a* (1: 1-5) : The Divine, Creative, Revelatory Word

a (1-2) : The divine Word with God

b (3ab) : The *mediation* of the divine Word *in creation*

c (3c-5) : The life-giving, revelatory Word opposed

b* (1:6-8) : *The Baptist's Mission of Testimony to the Revelatory Word*

c* (1:9-14) : The Revelatory, Regenerative, Incarnate Word

c' (9-11) : The revelatory Word rejected

d (12-13) : The *mediation* of the revelatory Word *in regeneration*

c" (14) : The incarnate, revelatory Word contemplated

b** (1:15) : *The Baptist's Testimony to the Divine, Incarnate Word*

a** (1:16-18) : The Incarnate, Revelatory, Divine Word

c''' (16) : The incarnate, revelatory Word participated

b' (17) : The *mediation* of Jesus Christ *in revelation*

a' (18) : The only divine revealer of God.

It is evident that "*The Baptist's Mission of Testimony to the Revelatory Word*" (b*) is parallel to "*The Baptist's Testimony to the Divine, Incarnate Word*" (b**), since both highlight John the Baptist's testimony. (Note that the name "John" is explicitly mentioned in vv. 6.15 and the expression "to testify to" occurs in vv. 7.8.15.)

Likewise there are many similar elements between "The Divine, Creative, Revelatory Word" (a*) and "The Incarnate, Revelatory, Divine Word" (a**). In fact, the first two verses 1-2 (a) and the last verse 18

3. Although a spiral structure of the Prologue (a*b*c*b**c**) was proposed in my doctoral thesis (*The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (Analecta Biblica 117, Rome, 1987, 131-33), in the light of further research I now suggest a concentric structure (a*b*c*b**a**)

(a') stress the revelatory (see "the Word" at v. 1 and "made [God] known" at v. 18) and the divine ("the Word was God": v. 1 and "only Son/God": v. 18) dimensions of the Word, who is dynamically related to God the Father ("the Word was *with* God": vv. 1-2 and "the only Son/God who is *in the bosom* of the Father": v. 18). The second sub-unit b of a* and b' of a** describe the *mediatory roles* of the Word/Jesus Christ in *creation* ("all things *came into being through him*": v. 3) and in *revelation* ("*grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ*": v. 17).

It is to be remembered that in any concentric structure, not only the first and the last elements will be similar but also the central element will have some similarity with the first and the last elements. This is found to be true in the case of the concentric plan of the Prologue (a*b*c*b**a**). The theme of the opposition to the revelation mentioned in the last sub-unit of a* (c: 'the life-giving revelatory Word *opposed*') is taken up and developed in the first sub-unit of c* (c': "the revelatory Word *rejected*") through the concatenation of three terms ("*light*: vv.4.5.9; "*man*": vv.4.9; "did not overcome" [*katelaben*]: v. 5; "did not receive" [*parelabon*]: v. 11). Likewise, the incarnate Word's "*fullness of grace and truth*" mentioned in the last sub-unit (c" v. 14) of c* is resumed in the first two sub-units of a** (c''' : "from his *fullness* we have all received, *grace upon grace*": v. 16; b': "*grace and truth*": v. 17). Just as the *central sub-units* (b and b') of a* and b* underline the *mediatory roles* of the divine Word in *creation* and of the incarnate Word in *revelation* respectively, the *central sub-unit* d of c* stresses the *mediatory role* of the Word in *regeneration* as the *children of God* ("he gave power to become children of God": v. 12).

It is noteworthy that the theme of "*becoming children of God*" (*tekna theou genesthai*) is mentioned at the very centre of the Prologue (1: 12-13), indicating its importance and highlighting the *regenerative role of the Word* to which the creative and revelatory roles of the Word are geared. In other words, the ultimate purpose of creation and revelation seems to be to enable human beings to become children of God (1: 12-13).

Jn 1: 12-13 may be translated literally and structurally as follows:

- x But [to] *all who received him*, (v. 12a)
- y he gave (them) power *to become children of God*, (v. 12b)
- x' *to those believing in his name*, (v. 12c)
- y' who, not from bloods, nor from [the] desire of flesh,
nor from [the] desire of husband, but *from God were born*. v. 13)

From the structure (x y x' y') it is evident that "*all who received him*" (x) is parallel to "*those believing in his name*" (x'), and *to become children of God* (y) is parallel to *from God were born* (y'). Now most Johannine commentators take it for granted that "those believing in his name" are Christians. For instance, R. E. Brown says: "12a and 12c really say the same thing.... It [12c] may have been added to stress that not only the original acceptance of Jesus (aorist in 12a), but also continued belief in him (present in 12c), entitled men to become God's children".⁴ According to this interpretation "believing in his name" is a reference to Christian faith in Jesus. In the words of Brown, "Belief in the name of Jesus is not different from belief in Jesus".⁵ But the incarnation of the Word is mentioned only in v. 14 ("And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us") and the name "Jesus Christ" occurs for the first time in the Prologue only in v. 17.

The fact that the Fourth Evangelist begins the Gospel with the presentation of the pre-existent divine Word stressing his relationships with God (1: 1-2), the whole of creation (1: 3 -4) and humankind (1:4-5.8-13) before mentioning the incarnation of the Word (1: 14) shows the universal horizon of the Johannine Gospel. It is to be noted that there is a gradation and a qualitative difference in the Word's relationship to the cosmos, living beings and human beings. Whereas the cosmos and all the things in it came into being *through* the Word and the Word was *in* the world, *life* is said to have come into being *in* the Word. The statement "what has come into being in him was life" is a further specification of creation. In other words, "life" (of all living creatures) is a special creation in the Word.

Here the primary meaning of "life" (*zoe*) is natural life. It may be objected by some that *zoe* everywhere else in the Gospel of John

4. *The Gospel according to John*, I (London, 1971), 11.

5. *Ibid*

refers to eternal life (for example, "life" in 3:36b is the same as "eternal life" in 3:36a). This is true, but it is to be remembered that "life" is mentioned for the first time at 1:4 and here it is not qualified by the adjective "eternal", and the reader cannot be expected to understand "life" as "eternal life" since nothing has been said about it earlier, nor is it clear from the immediate context. Furthermore, "eternal life" in the Gospel of John is eternal precisely because it is the life of God who is eternal, which does not have a beginning, whereas life's coming into existence in time is affirmed in 1:3c-4a: "What has come into being in him [the Word] was life" (NRSV)⁶. This "coming into being" cannot be affirmed of the eternal life of the Word, since from all eternity the divine Word existed (1: 1) and therefore had the divine life in him (cf 5:26). But it makes sense to say that what came into existence in him was life, that is, natural life of all living beings that were created. Furthermore, "to live" (*zen*) is sometimes used in John to denote physical/natural life (e.g. 4:50.51.53; 11:26), although at other times it refers to eternal life (e.g. 11:25). In short, there is a progression in the theological thought in 1:3-4: all things came into existence *through* (the mediation of) the Word of God, but the life of all living beings (plants, animals, humans) was created *in* (within) the Word. God's Word envelops life, as if it were, a womb, which protects and nourishes life and makes it grow. This shows the sacredness of all life.

The mystery of "life" was the guiding light of humans from the beginning of history: "the life was the light of men and the light shines in the darkness" (1:4b-5a). In other words, life (of plants, animals and especially of humans) was the light of revelation for humankind and it continues to be so even today. Living beings manifest God's presence in an eminent way because they are within the Word of God and so reveal the richness of God's life. The numberless forms of life (plants, animals, human beings) and their bewitching beauty are all reflections of God's own life in abundance. By contemplating the variety of plants with their colourful leaves, fragrant flowers and fresh fruits, the innumerable kinds of fish in the rivers and oceans, the countless creeping creatures and animals on the earth, the beautiful birds and butterflies that fly in the sky, etc., we can be drawn to the

6. Grammatically an alternate translation of 1:4a is possible: "In him was life" (RSV). But the NRSV is preferable to the RSV (cf. *ibid.*, 6-7).

God of life. "And the life was the light of human beings, that is, of all peoples of all places and times. In other words, meditating on the mystery of life on earth we can get a glimpse of God's life which can light up and guide our lives. This light continues to shine in the darkness of the sinful world, for the darkness of evil has not overcome it (1: 5). The light of life is the beacon of God that beckons people to protect and promote life.

From the time of creation God had been revealing to human beings not only through creatures and especially through living beings but also through his Word: "the true light that enlightens every human being was coming into the world" (1:9). This does not refer primarily to the incarnate Word, since the incarnation is mentioned only much later (1:14) but to the Word's continuous coming into the world of humankind. From the dawn of human history God's Word kept coming into the world so frequently that it can be affirmed: "he was in the world" (1:10a). But, although the world was created through the Word (1:10b; cf 1:3) and the Word was present in the world, "the world did not know him" (1:10c). Many men and women failed to recognize God's word. "He came to his own and his own did not receive him" (1:11). Here "his own" has a double meaning: his own world of humans (whom God created in and through His Word) and his own people of Israel (whom God chose and to whom God spoke through Moses and the prophets; cf. the frequent refrain in the Prophets: "the Word of God came to" so and so). But the story of humankind and of Israel has been mostly a story of the rejection of God's Word (1: 10-11). But this was not a total rejection of the Word by humanity or by his own people, for some did accept God's Word.

And to "those who received him [the Word], he gave them power to become children of God" (1:12). Therefore, according to the Johannine understanding, all those who welcome the Word of God and "believe in his name" are empowered to become children of God (1: 12). Here "his name" does not necessarily mean "Jesus' name", since Jesus has not yet been introduced to the reader of the Prologue; the name "Jesus Christ" is given for the first time only in v. 17. Since "the word" has been the focus of the Prologue from 1:1 till 1:13, and since the incarnation of the Word is mentioned only at 1:14 and "Jesus Christ" at 1:17, "his name" at 1:12 refers to the Word of God before the incarnation and therefore "those who believe in his name" are not necessarily Christians, as most of the Johannine

scholars hold, but to all true believers of all times, the genuine followers of all religions who welcome the Word of God in their hearts and live according to the divine revelation received.

According to John, those who welcome the Word of God are not adopted children of God (as in Paul) but genuine children of God, since they are "born of God". It is not birth from human parents but birth from God that makes humans children of God. This is emphatically stated in 1: 13: "who were born, not from bloods, nor from the desire of flesh, nor from the desire of husband but from God".

If all those who welcomed the Word of God, all the believers of religions in and through which God's Word had been revealed, were already God's children even before the coming of Christ, one may ask: what is the salvific meaning of the incarnation? Unlike the Letter to the Hebrews which contrasts God's speaking through the prophets to our ancestors with God's speaking through his Son in the last times ("In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; *but* in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son": 1: 1-2), the Johannine Gospel links God's revelation through His Word from the beginning of humankind (1:9-13) with His revelation through His incarnate Word Jesus Christ (1: 14-18). It is the same divine, creative, revelatory, regenerative Word (1:1-13) that now becomes enfleshed: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of an only son from a father, full of grace and truth... for from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace; for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came to be through Jesus Christ." The glory of the enfleshed Word is like that of an only son (*monogenes*) of a father. The son reflects the glory of the father; the enfleshed divine Son of God manifests the glory of God the Father, who is "full of grace and truth".⁷ If "grace and truth" is a reference to the O. T. *hesed w'emet*, Yahweh's merciful love and fidelity to the covenantal promises, the enfleshed Word manifests in and through his words and deeds, life and death, the

7. Normally the expression "full of grace and truth" (*Pleres charitos kai aletheias*) is understood by exegetes to qualify "the Word" (*ho logos*) or the "only-Son" (*monogenous*). But since *pleres* is often indeclinable, and since it is closer to *patros* than to *Logos* or *monogenes*, it is better to regard it as modifying the "Father" (*patros*) than "the Word" or the "only Son"

Father's merciful and faithful love (1:14; cf. 3:16). It is from God the Father's "fullness" (*pleroma*) that "we have all received grace upon grace" (1:16). This "grace upon grace" does not mean a substitution of one favour with another but rather a second favour is added to the first. This is confirmed by 1: 17 which is an explanation of 1:16. V. 17 states: "for (*hoti*) the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ". It is to be noted that "the law" is not contrasted with "the grace and truth".⁸ Both "the law" and "the grace and truth" are God's gratuitous gifts given through Moses and through Jesus Christ respectively. This makes sense if it is kept in mind that the Law was the expression of God's will for the good of the covenantal people of God; God revealed himself to the people of Israel through the Law of the covenant. Similarly, God's merciful love and unfailing faithfulness has been manifested through Jesus Christ, the enfleshed Word of God. There is both continuity and progression between God's revelation through Moses and through Jesus Christ. But there is also a qualitative difference between Moses and Jesus, since it is affirmed: "No one has ever seen God; an only-Son-God (*monogenes theos*), who is in the bosom of the Father, has made [him] known" (1: 18). Direct physical vision of God is denied to any human being (even to Moses) but Jesus has been able to reveal the Father precisely because he is the beloved Son of God who is close to the heart of God. The only-Son-God is able to make known the Father-God, because the Son is, as it were, resting on the bosom/heart of the Father and turning towards the face of the Father.

The above study of the Prologue and in particular of the roles of the Word of God and the meaning of "the children of God" at 1: 12 is meant to bring out the Johannine universalism of creation, revelation and salvation. From the beginning of creation God's Word has been actively present in creatures, revealing God through living beings and, more especially, enlightening all human beings and enabling those who welcome the Word of God to become children of God. The incarnate Word has manifested God as a Father full of grace and truth.

8. Notice that there is no "but" (*alla*) between 1: 17a and 1: 17b.

2. The universal life-giving mission of the Johannine Jesus

Salvation in the Gospel of John is understood primarily and positively as eternal life (3:16-17) or life in abundance (10:10), and secondarily and negatively as liberation from sin (1:29; 8:31-36). The ministry of the Johannine Jesus highlights the different dimensions of his life-giving mission, which we shall briefly examine in the development of Jn 1-12.⁹

We have already seen above that the Prologue presents the divinity of the Word (1:1.18) and his progressive relationships, first, with all creatures (1:3 ab), then with living beings (1:3 c-4a) and finally with human beings in particular (1:4b.9-13). The Prologue also underlines the fact that the majority of human beings and the people of Israel rejected God's Word (1:10-11) but some did welcome the Word of God and become children of God (1:12). This fact will be repeated in the ministry of Jesus, the incarnate Word (1:14), as recounted and interpreted by the Fourth Evangelist (1-21).

God sends John the Baptist to bear testimony to the light so that "all may believe through him" (1:6-7) and he bears witness to Jesus as the Messiah, the Lamb of God and the Son of God (1:19-34), and yet most of the Jews do not believe in Jesus. But a few of them follow him and become his disciples and discover that he is the Messiah (1:41), the eschatological prophet foretold by Moses and the prophets (1:45), and the Son of God and the king of Israel (1:50). It is to be noted that the first thing that the Johannine Jesus does is to gather disciples around him by revealing himself to them (1:35-51) and by promising those who believe (in) him the vision of "greater things" (1:50), of "heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (1:51). Precisely because Jesus is God's Word incarnate, he is the human revealer *par excellence* of God (cf 1:14.18). The human Jesus is the ladder (cf. Jacob's dream in Gen 28:12.17) linking the world of humanity to the God of heaven. This again underscores the universal dimension of the revelatory role of Jesus, the Son of Man. It is to be noted that the Johannine Jesus accepts as

9. "See G. Mlakuzhyil, *op.cit.*, 137-241- 299-347 for a detailed discussion of the Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel and the Theological Sketch in the plan of the Gospel.

his disciples all those who come to him and listen to his words and welcome his invitation to "come and see" (1:35-51), fulfilling the universal salvific plan of God's Word that empowers receptive humans to become children of God (1:12). In other words, what Jesus, the incarnate Word, does at the beginning of his ministry (and during the entire ministry, as we shall see later) is the concrete manifestation of what the Word of God was doing from the beginning of humankind.

It is noteworthy that the first miracle that Jesus performs is to provide abundance of good wine for the wedding feast at Cana (2: 1-10), inaugurating the Messianic era of abundance, symbolic of life in abundance, which he has come to give (cf 10: 10). Just as God changed chaos into cosmos through the power of His word (cf Gen 1: 1-2,4), so Jesus, the enfleshed Word, transforms the water for purification into the best wine for the wedding feast (Jn 2:6-10). This miracle is called the "beginning of the signs" that Jesus did, and it symbolizes the fullness of life that he has come to communicate to people. By responding positively to a situation of a great want Jesus manifests his glory as the Messianic bridegroom, and the disciples commit themselves to him (like a bride to her bridegroom: cf 3:29) by believing in him. Thus through faith they enter into a personally intimate relationship with Jesus, and from now on they accompany him wherever he goes (2:13.17., etc.). The relationship between God's Word and the believers of all times is symbolised and deepened by the faith-commitment of the disciples to Jesus, the Messianic bridegroom (2:11), with whom they enter into a close communion of life as his disciples and friends (2:12; cf 15:14).

If in the first sign at Cana Jesus provided plenty of wine for a Jewish wedding feast, in the second sign he heals the dying son of a Gentile royal official from Capernaum through the power of his life-giving word (4:46-54). Just as the Jewish servants at the Cana wedding listened to Jesus and obeyed his instructions (2:7-8), so the Gentile official believed Jesus' word ("Go, your son lives": 4:50) and the miraculous cure of his son took place at a distance at the very moment when Jesus told him that his son would live (4:51-53). Just as the first Jewish disciples made their faith-commitment at Cana (2: 11), so the Gentile royal official and his whole household at Capernaum became believers (5:44). This highlights that Jesus' mission is not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. In other words, his life-giving mission is universal.

The Samaritan episode underscores another dimension of the universal mission of Jesus, namely, he comes to seek and save the sinners and the outcast (4:4-42). It is true that Jesus is sent to save the whole world (3:16; 4:42) but he has a special predilection for the least, the last, the lost, the marginalised in society. Hence he feels within himself the divine necessity (*edei*: 4:4) to go through Samaria, though it was not necessary to pass through Samaria to go from Judea to Galilee. He could have, like other Jews of his time, avoided Samaria, by crossing the Jordan river and passing through Perea and going across the river again to Galilee. The Evangelist tells us: "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (4: 10). That is why the Samaritan woman is shocked when Jesus asks her for water ("How can you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?": 4:9). Her shock would be like that of a Dalit woman, if a Brahmin were to request her to give him a glass of water!. In fact, even the disciples are surprised to see Jesus talking with a woman (4:27). By going against unjust social customs Jesus shows that he has come to liberate people from their prejudices and lead them to genuine freedom and human fellowship. He has the inner freedom of the Spirit to enter into a dialogue with the sinful Samaritan woman blinded by her prejudices, bounded by socio-cultural customs and fettered by her loose life. So he offers her God's gift of "living water" (4: 10), namely, the Holy Spirit (cf 7:37-39). This is the "living water" that will well up into eternal life (4:14). When she expresses her desire to have this water (4:15), Jesus gently persuades her to look into her immoral life which prevents her from receiving the Holy Spirit (4:16). As a prophet Jesus challenges her to change her sinful life (4:18-19). He also frees her from localized cultic restrictions and invites her to worship the Father "in Spirit and truth" (4:20-24). This brings out the universal aspect of worshipping God beyond the man-made temples in Jerusalem or Gerizim (Ayodhya or Bethlehem, Mecca or Rome). More than the place of worship, what matters most is the quality of worship, namely, filial worship of the Father under the guidance of the Spirit of God who leads all believers into the fullness of truth (4:24; cf. 16:13). It is significant that the Johannine Jesus openly reveals himself as the expected Messiah of the Samaritans to a sinful woman (4:25-26) and transforms her into a missionary to bring the people of the town to him (4:29-30) and to lead them to faith in him through her testimony (4:39). By accepting the Samaritans' invitation to stay with them (4:40), Jesus shows that his saving mission is not

only to the Jews but also to the Samaritans. Colour, caste or creed does not prevent the incarnate Word from carrying out the regenerative mission of God's Word to all those who are open to his revelation (cf. 1:12). By welcoming the enfleshed Word into their homes and welcoming his word into their hearts, they become believers (4:42) and children of God (cf 1: 12: "to all those who received him, he gave them power to become children of God"). By listening to his word of revelation the Samaritans recognize Jesus not only as their Saviour but as the Saviour of the world (4:42).¹⁰

Looking back over the first phase of Jesus' ministry and mission, we find that Jesus is truly the Saviour not only of the Jews but also of the Samaritans and the Gentiles, and, in fact, of the whole world. The universal dimension of his life-giving mission is highlighted in almost all the episodes, in the "Introduction" (1: 1-2, 1 1) and in "Jesus' Initial Signs and Encounters (from Cana to Samaria (Jn 2-4)).¹¹ All those who are open to his revelation through his words and deeds, miraculous signs and challenging dialogues, prophetic acts and revelatory discourses, experience unconditional love and salvation. Nobody (whether Jew or Gentile or Samaritan) is excluded from his life-giving mission and through it Jesus, the enfleshed Word of God, tries to bring together the Jewish, Samaritan and Gentile children of God, symbolizing peoples of all times who are receptive to God's Word of revelation and salvation.

Jesus' attempt to gather the children of God continues in Jn 5-10. Whereas in Jn 2-4 the responses to the revelation Jesus, the Messiah, have been on the whole positive, as we have seen above, in Jn 5-10 there is increasing opposition to the progressive revelation of Jesus, the Worker-Son of God, especially during the Jewish feasts of Sabbath (Jn 5), Passover (Jn 6), Tabernacles (Jn 7-8), another Sabbath (Jn 9) and Dedication (10:22-42). What was said in the Prologue about the non-recognition and rejection of the Word of God by the world and his own people (1: 11) comes true in the failure of the Jewish people and especially of the Jewish authorities to recognize the revelatory and life-giving mission of Jesus and his prophetic, Messianic and divine identity in Jn 5-10. Jesus is suspected of being a false prophet/Messiah and is accused of blasphemy, and attempts are made to arrest him, to

10. We have already seen in the second sign at Cana that Jesus is also the life-giving Saviour of the Gentiles.

11. Cf. G. Mlakuzhyil *op.cit.*, 300-312.

stone him and even to kill him. But even here some are open to God's revelation in Jesus and respond to him in faith. Thus though Jesus has come to gather all the sheep and give them life in abundance (10:10), many refuse to follow the shepherd and so get scattered!

Jesus' concern for the hungry is highlighted in his feeding of the five thousand in Jn 6. Whereas in the Synoptic Gospels the disciples request Jesus to send the crowd away so that the people could go to the villages and have their meal, the Johannine Jesus takes the initiative to give food to the crowd that comes to him, for he asks Philip: "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" (6:5) and gives them abundance of bread and fish (6:11). Jesus knows very well that God can come to the hungry only in the form of bread (e.g. God's gift of manna to the hungry Israelites in the desert: "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat": Ex 16:15). By feeding the hungry crowd he makes God present to them by first meeting their physical need for food. By feeding the five thousand Jesus manifests himself to the crowd as the expected eschatological prophet (6:14). Feeding the hungry is to be the constant concern of all his disciples. That is why Jesus asks them: "How are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?" Genuine concern for the hungry and the thirsty is a sign of the children of God who belong to the kingdom of God (cf. Mt 25:34-35). Hence we may ask: "Who are the true children of God? Those who call themselves Christians but are not in the least concerned about the plight of millions of hungry people in the world, or those who share their bread like the lad who gave Jesus his five loaves of bread and two fish to be distributed to the people (Jn 6:9-11), and like the generous Sikhs who run *langar* (free community-meal) for the hungry at hundreds of *gurdwaras* every day? Just as Jesus, the Son of God, fed the hungry irrespective of their religious affiliation (Jews or Gentiles), the Sikhs give food to all who come to the community-meal, whether they be Sikhs or Hindus, Muslims or Christians.

If Jesus presented himself as "the bread of life" by feeding the hungry crowd and by the dialogue-discourse with the people following him at the Passover feast (Jn 6), he reveals himself as the source of "living water" and "the light of the world" at the feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7-9). It is worthy of note that Jesus uses universal symbols like bread, water, light, etc. to designate the gifts of God he has come to give. This emphasizes the universal dimension of his mission. This is highlighted by inclusive statements like: "I am the bread of life. *Whoever*

comes to me will never be hungry, and *whoever believes in me* will never be thirsty" (6:35); "Let *anyone who is thirsty* come to me, and let the *one who believes in me* drink" (7:37); "I am the light of the world. *Whoever follows me* will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (8:12). Everybody, without any distinction of colour, caste or sex, is invited to eat the bread of life and drink the living water and follow the light of the world. All those who are hungry and thirsty and walking in the dark are welcome; nobody is excluded. We have seen above that even a sinful Samaritan woman was invited to receive the living water, namely, God's gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. 4: 10).

Jesus is not only the fountain of "living water" but also "the light of the world" (8:12), that is, the light of revelation for humankind so that all may have "the light of life" (8:12). Just as a torch-light at night shows us the path on which to walk, so Jesus is the light that reveals the path to abundant life. He is the revelation of life; his words and deeds, life and death, manifest the meaning of life here on earth and lead humans to the fullness of life now and hereafter. But one must be willing to "follow" the light (8:12), and must "abide" (*menein*) in his word (8:31), which will enable one to experientially "know the truth" (8:31) and which will make the person free (8:31) from the slavery of sin (8:34-36) and from self-centredness (12:24-26). If "there are rays of light in other religions", as Vatican II has taught, will not those who follow that light come to know the liberating truth (8:12.31)?

Jesus' miraculous work of giving sight to a man born blind illustrates how he is the light of the world (9:4-5) and how those who follow him are not only freed from the darkness but also become luminous witnesses to the truth, especially in the face of opposition from the forces of darkness (9:6-39), for a blind beggar receives not only physical sight but also spiritual insight into Jesus as the prophet (9:17) come from God (9:30-33) and eventually as "the Son of Man" (9:35-38). Just as Jesus came into this world to bear witness to the truth (18:37), those who are enlightened by Jesus also bear bold testimony to the truth even in the midst of opposition and persecution, as the cured blind man did when he was questioned, abused and thrown out of the synagogue by the blind Pharisees. Thus a blind beggar, who was thought of as a sinner (9:2), becomes a true disciple of Jesus (9:28) - an illiterate beggar by remaining steadfast in Jesus' word discovers the liberating truth (8:31-32) and defends it against the presumptuous theologians of his time (9:28-29.34). Are not all those who are standing

for the truth and being persecuted for it truly disciples of “the true light that enlightens every human being” (1:9; 9:5)? Gandhiji used to say: “Truth is God”. All those who, like Gandhiji, follow with determination and dedication the light of truth, are true children of the light (12:36), authentic children of God, the light (1 Jn 1:5) and genuine disciples of Jesus, the truth (Jn 14:6).

The true disciples of Jesus are the sheep who listen to the shepherd's voice and follow him (10: 4.27). And Jesus has come that “they may have life and have it abundantly” (10: 10) and he gives them this life in abundance by laying down his life for them as the good shepherd (10: 11.15) because he knows them intimately and lovingly (10: 14). He has come not only for the sheep of Israel but also for the “other sheep which do not belong to this fold”, and he “must bring them also”. Thus Jesus is the universal shepherd of the Jews and Gentiles. We have seen above that Jesus saves the Gentile official's son from death and gathers him and his household into the community of believers (4:46-54). Similarly, Jesus, like a good shepherd, seeks the sinful Samaritan woman and offers her living water (4:4-15), teaches her how to worship the Father in Spirit and truth, and reveals himself to her as also the Messiah for the Samaritans (4:16-26). Just as a shepherd stays with his sheep, Jesus remains with the Samaritans to whom he manifests himself as “the Saviour of the world” (4:40-42).

3. Gathering the Scattered Children of God through Jesus' Death

That Jesus is the good shepherd who is willing to lay down his life to give life to others is illustrated in the Lazarus episode (Jn 11). We are told that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus (11: 5.3 6). Jesus himself refers to Lazarus as “our friend” (11:11) and would later tell his disciples: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (15:13). Even when his disciples try to dissuade him from going to Bethany because of the recent Jewish attempt at stoning him (11: 8), he decides to risk his life to “awaken” his friend from death (11:11.15). Thomas's invitation to his fellow-disciples: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (11: 16) shows the real danger to Jesus' life in Judea. In fact, the immediate reason for the Jewish high priests and the Pharisees to call the Sanhedrin and to decide to do away with Jesus is his raising the dead Lazarus to life (11:45-53). Since the soteriological significance of Jesus' death is interpreted by the

Evangelist in this pericope in terms of "gathering the dispersed children of God into one" (11:52), we shall examine it in some detail.

The Plan of the Pericope (11: 45- 53)

R (11:45-46): Reactions of the Jews to Jesus' Sign of Raising Lazarus to Life

a (v. 45): positive faith-response of many of the Jews

a' (v. 46): reporting to the Pharisees by some of the Jews

R' (11:47-53): Reactions of the High Priests and the Pharisees to Jesus' Signs

a" (vv. 47-48): their bewilderment at Jesus' signs and their fear of the Romans

b (vv. 49-50): Caiaphas' counsel about Jesus' death for the people

b' (vv. 51-52): Evangelist's soteriological interpretation of Jesus' death

a''' (v. 53) : their decision and plan to kill Jesus.

The reactions of the Jews, who had come to console Martha and Mary (11: 19.31), to "what Jesus did"¹² were twofold: a. positive, and a'. negative.

All the Jews who were with Mary watched the weeping Jesus (11: 35) who had been "greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved" (11:33) when he saw Mary and the crowd weeping (11: 33). Seeing Jesus in tears on the way to the tomb of Lazarus was interpreted by the Jews in different ways. While many kept saying: "See how he loved him!" (11:36), some of them said disapprovingly: "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" (11:37).

Again, all the Jews who accompanied Mary and Jesus to the tomb heard Jesus' command to "take away the stone" (11:39) from the entrance to the tomb and his words to the protesting Martha: "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (11:40; cf. 11:4). He was pointing to her lack of faith and inviting her to believe so that she may recognize God's glory that is going to be revealed. Furthermore, the Jews heard Jesus addressing God as "Father" and thanking Him for "having heard him" and for "hearing him always" and

12 It is to be noted that the object *ha* of the verb *epoiesen* at 11: 45 is plural, and hence "what he did" refers not only to the miracle of raising the dead Lazarus to life but also everything else he did before, during and after bringing him back to life.

praying to the Father that the crowd “may believe that you sent me” (11:41-42). The crowd also heard Jesus’ loud command/cry: “Lazarus, come out!” (11: 43) and saw ‘the dead man coming out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped in a cloth’ (11:44). They also listened to Jesus’ instructions to “unbind him, and let him go” (11:44).

Having witnessed Jesus’ weeping and praying and bringing the dead Lazarus back to life and setting him free, many of the Jews believed in him (11:45). But it is surprising that, in spite seeing the great sign of raising a dead man to life, some of the Jews refused to believe in him and reported the matter to the authorities (11:46). Whereas many come to faith because of the Lazarus episode, others “go away” to the hostile Pharisees (11:45-46). There is a “gathering” of the believers and a “dispersal” of the unbelievers!

The news of the climactic sign of raising Lazarus to life causes an adverse and hostile reaction among the Jewish authorities. The chief priests and the Pharisees “gather the council”. There is a “synagoguing” of those who plot against Jesus, the life-giver! They ask themselves: “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs” (11:47). Instead of recognising the signs as miracles which authenticate and manifest the Messianic mission of Jesus and believing in him as the Christ (cf. 7:31; 20:30-31), they plan to prevent him from doing any more signs which would lead all people to believe in him (11:48). They not only do not believe in him but also want to prevent others from believing in him and having eternal life (cf. 3:36: “whoever believes in the Son has eternal life”)!

The arrogant and unscrupulous high priest Caiaphas counsels the council members to play the politics of opportunism: “You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is *to your interest/advantage* that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation should not perish (11:49-50). It is to be noted that Caiaphas speaks of “the people” (*ho laos*) and “the nation” (*to ethnos*) but intends the two nouns to refer to the same reality of Israel. It is clear from the context of 11:49-52 that *to ethnos* refers to the Jewish nation. This is supported by its use at 18:35, where Pilate tells Jesus: “your own nation (*to ethnos to son*) and the chief priests have handed you over to me.” In short, *to ethnos* designates the Jewish people/nation. But the meaning of *laos* is not so evident. It is found only here and at 18:14, which is a

repetition of 11: 50. The majority of Johannine exegetes, both ancient and modern, take the two terms *laos* and *ethnos* as synonyms referring to the Jewish people/nation.¹³ A few find a different nuance in the meaning of the two terms. For instance, F. J. Moloney says: "Two words are used for Israel as a nation: *laos*, which applies to the chosen people, and *ethnos*, which relates to its civic situation".¹⁴

But the Evangelist's interpretation of Caiaphas' words includes among the "the people" not only the Jewish nation but also "the scattered children of God" (11: 51-52). In other words, "the people" (of God) for John is wider than the Jewish "nation" (*ethnos*) and Jesus' death will have a salvific significance not only for the Jews but for all (people).¹⁵ Through the death of Jesus, which will have a salutary effect on the Jewish nation, the scattered children of God are going to be gathered into unity. This is confirmed by the Johannine Jesus' statement when the Greeks come to Jesus: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* (people) to myself". This is interpreted by the Evangelist as "indicating the kind of death he was to die" (12:33). In other words, Jesus' death on the cross will have a universal salvific significance for *all* (*pantes*).

There is a lot of discussion among Johannine exegetes about the identity of "the scattered children of God". "The great majority of

13 For example, C. K. Barrett states: "*ethnos* and *laos* are evidently used as synonyms" (*The Gospel according to St. John*, 2 nd ed., London, 1978, 407).

14 *Signs and Shadows, Reading John 5-12* (Mnneapolis, 1996), 175, n. 89.

15 Cf. M. Vellanickal comments: By the words 'one man should die for the *laos*' Caiaphas meant the Jewish nation according to the classical usage of OT and Judaism. But he said *laos*. And for the Evangelist it meant the 'people of God', comprising all those who believe (both Jews and Gentiles), the children of God... Jesus dies for the people of God (*laos*), in which, part of the Jewish nation is included (*me holon to ethnos apoletai*) because he is dying for the Jews too (*hyper tou ethnous*). Therefore the Evangelist could specify that Jesus dies not only for the Jewish nation (*kai ouch hyper tou ethnous monon*), but for all who would be made 'children of God' (op. cit., 223; cf. also S. Pancaro, "People of God' in St. John's Gospel", *NTS*, 16 (1969-70), 114-129). It must, however, be remarked that the Johannine text at 11:52 says: "to gather into one the dispersed children of God" and not "for all who would be made 'children of God'". According to 11:52 the scattered persons are already children of God and they are not going to be made children of God through the death of Jesus.

scholars, ancient and modern, identify them with the Gentiles, namely, all those who are outside the Jewish people".¹⁶ But the Evangelist does not regard all the Gentiles (nor all the Jews) as "children of God". As we have seen above, it is only those who welcome the Word of God (whether they be Jews or Gentiles) and who continue to believe in his name are empowered to become children of God (1: 12) and are born of God (1: 13). In short, "the children of God" are those who are open to God's Word and allow themselves to be transformed by the divine Word and are willing to do the will of God, irrespective of whether they are Gentiles or Jews.

If the believing Jews and Gentiles are "the children of God", why are they designated as "scattered"¹⁷. During the parabolic allegory of the good shepherd Jesus mentions the wolf that "snatches" the sheep and "scatters" them. And towards the end of the farewell discourse Jesus tells the disciples: "The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered". This is clearly a reference to Jesus' hour of the passion and death which becomes imminent with the Sanhedrin's decision to kill Jesus (11: 53; cf. 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). The chief priests and the Pharisees, like a group of wolves, "gather the Sanhedrin", in order to plot how to 'snatch' the shepherd and thus 'scatter' the sheep, the believers, for they say to themselves: "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him" (11:47-48). Through the many signs Jesus was trying to 'gather' the sheep who listen to his voice (10:3), the signs being miracles that symbolize the life in abundance that he has come to give (10:10).

Caiaphas advises his colleagues to strike the shepherd dead so that the sheep (present and future) will be 'scattered' (11:50; cf. 16:32). But in God's plan of salvation Jesus' death would "gather into one the scattered children of God" (11:52)! In fact, according to the Johannine understanding of the death of Jesus, he is not a helpless victim of the Jewish authorities' plot to murder him, but Jesus, the good shepherd, lays down his life for the sheep on his own accord and no one takes it

16 M. Vellanickal, *op. cit.*, 214 and n. 247.

17 The verb *diaskopizein* is often used in the LXX for the Jews of the Diaspora (living outside Israel) but it does not occur anywhere else in Jn, although *skopizein* is found at 10:12 and 16:32.

away from him (10:11. 15.17-18). And he dies not only for the sheep of the Jewish fold but also for those of the Gentiles, for he says: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also". All those who will listen to his voice will become one flock and there will be one shepherd. It is to be noted that Jesus does not say that there will be "one sheep-fold" (*mia aule*) but "one flock" (*mia poimne*), which means that there are and will continue to be different sheep-folds belonging to the Jews and to the Gentiles, but all of them will belong to the same flock of the children of God.

The death of Jesus is described by the Evangelist in a very remarkable and soteriologically significant manner (19:28-30). The crucified Jesus says: "I thirst" (19:28: *dipso*) and "so they put a sponge full of vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished" (*tetelestai*) and bowing his head he handed over the Spirit" (19:29-30).¹⁸ In other words, the crucified Jesus dies by giving the Spirit to those who gave him something to quench his thirst. But we are not told who gave Jesus the drink.¹⁹ Whoever "they" (19:29) are, the dying Jesus gives (them) the life-giving Spirit (19:30; cf. 6:63). All those who give a drink to a thirsty person are given the gift of the Spirit of God/Jesus (cf. 4:10), indicating thereby that they are children of God, who are worthy to inherit eternal life.²⁰

Furthermore, we are told that (Gentile) soldiers came to (the already dead) Jesus and one of them pierced his side from which "blood and water flowed" (19:33-34). And the Evangelist adds that, as a result of

18 Normally all Johannine exegetes translate *paredoken to pneuma* as "he gave up his spirit", which is interpreted simply as "he died". But it is to be noted that *paradidomi* here has a double meaning: "to give up" and "to hand over" (cf. *paradidomi* at 19:16, where Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified.) We are not explicitly told at 19:30 to whom Jesus "handed over the Spirit". In the immediate context it has a double meaning, namely, he gave up the Spirit to the Father, and he handed over the spirit to the persons who gave him vinegar to drink.

19 John simply says "they", which may mean those present there. According to Mk 15:35-36 it is one of the bystanders who gave Jesus vinegar to drink.

20 Cf. Jesus' saying: "I was thirsty and you gave me to drink" (Mt 2 5:3 5) and "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). These are the righteous who will have eternal life (Mt 25:46).

this, the soldier believed: "And he who saw it has borne witness - and his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth - that you also may believe" (19:35). This means that seeing the flow of blood and water from the side of Jesus, the soldier who pierced Jesus' side became a believer, and his testimony is given in order to persuade the readers of the Gospel too to believe.²¹

The Evangelist considers the piercing of Jesus' side as the fulfilment of the Scriptures: "For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled... 'they shall look on him whom they have pierced...'" (19:36-37; cf. Zech 12: 10). That the death of Jesus would lead those who crucified him to the faith-discovery of his true identity was foretold by Jesus himself when he said: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am..." (8:28). Hence not only the prophecy of Zechariah (12:10) but also the prediction of Jesus is fulfilled by the soldier's faith vision.²²

That the "lifted up" Jesus would draw all to himself (12:32) and "gather the scattered children of God" (11: 52) is again symbolically shown by the coming of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to give Jesus a royal burial (19:38-42). The death of Jesus frees the secret disciple Joseph of Arimathea from his fear of the Jews and enables him to come out openly to bury Jesus (19:38). Similarly it gives Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus at night, the courage to come publicly and honour Jesus by burying him with a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes (19:39).

21 From the immediate context of 19:32-35 it is clear that the person who saw the flow of blood and water from the pierced side of Jesus and believed and testified is the soldier who pierced Jesus' dead body, because, just before affirming "And he who saw it has borne witness", it is clearly stated: "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water" (19:34). Hence it is the soldier who was the witness to the flow of blood and water, and not the Beloved Disciple, as most Johannine scholars presume. For example, R. E. Brown affirms: "in John xix 35 it is the Beloved Disciple" who "testifies" (*op. cit.* II, 952). On the contrary, according 19:27, the Beloved Disciple" was not there when the soldier pierced Jesus' side, since he had gone away with Jesus' mother (19:27: "And from that hour the disciple took her into his home"), that is, before Jesus' death on the cross (19:30) and therefore before the piercing of Jesus' side(19:34).

22 Similarly, in the Gospel of Mark, the Centurion who witnesses Jesus' death on the cross confesses: "This man was truly God's Son!" (Mk 16:39).

In short, in the name of expediency the high priests and the Pharisees decide to murder Jesus, with the hope of preventing people from believing in him and to scatter the believers. But in the universal plan of salvation, Jesus' death draws the people to himself and "gathers the scattered children of God into one" (11:47-53).

In the history of Christianity, starting from Jesus, the (religious and/ or political) leaders have tried to kill the shepherds to "scatter" the sheep but the martyrdom of the leaders (like Archbishop Romero) has helped the flock to "gather" together and to rally round the cause for which its leaders laid down their lives.

The "gathering" of the children of God, who were "scattered" during the hour of Jesus' passion and death (16:3 2), is continued by the risen Lord. He sends Mary Magdalene to them with the Easter good news: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (20:17). He himself comes to them with the Easter greetings of peace (*shalom*) and empowers them with the gift of the Holy Spirit to continue his universal, reconciling and life-giving mission (20:19-23). He gathers the doubting Thomas into his community (flock) and pronounces the beatitude of the believers of all times and places: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (20:29: *makarioi hoi me idontes kai pisteusantes*). Are not people of other faiths who believe, without having seen, included in this beatitude?

As a caring mother gathers her children for meals, the risen Lord invites his worker-disciples (who had toiled in vain the whole night) for breakfast and he serves them with bread and fish (21:1-14), as he had fed the hungry crowd earlier (6:1-14).

The risen Jesus also commissions Simon Peter to feed his lambs and sheep (21:15-17) and asks him to "follow" him to death on the cross (21:18-19). Peter is asked to love Jesus' sheep and care for them to the extent of laying down his life for them, just as Jesus, the good shepherd, did (10:11. 14-18), so they may have life in abundance (10: 10).

Conclusion

In the light of our discussion of the Word of God and the children of God in the Prologue, the universal life-giving mission of Jesus, and the gathering of the children of God through his death and resurrection, we are now in a position to reconcile the universalist and apparently exclusivist passages in the Gospel of John.

We have seen that the Word of God had revelatory and regenerative roles in the history of humankind (1:9-13) even before the Incarnation of the Word (1:14), for God's Word had been enlightening every human being and was in the world of humanity from the beginning, and all those who welcomed the Word of God were empowered to become children of God. Hence it is not only those who believe in Jesus Christ but also all those who are open to God's Word and allow themselves to be transformed are truly God's children (1:12ab). Becoming children of God, however, is not something that is achieved once and for all, for they must continue to be committed to the Word of God (1:12c). This is true also of those who believe in Jesus Christ, for he tells them: "If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (8:31-32). One must, as it were, breathe in continuously the life-giving Word of God/Jesus in order to become and continue to be God's sons and daughters and to enjoy the freedom of the children of God and to have eternal life (note the present participle *pisteuontes* at 1:12c and 20:31d). Hence the way of becoming children of God before and after the Incarnation is the path of faith, a committed and constant response to God's revelation. Only "one who believes" (*ho pisteuon*, that is, one who believes and continues to believe) has eternal life (3:16.36; 20:31) and "one who disbelieves" (*ho mepisteuon*, that is, the one who refuses to believe and continues in the disbelief) is condemned (3:18-36) because it is a sin against the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt. 12:31-32). Those who refuse to welcome God's Word will be walking in darkness (Jn 12:35) but those who are willing to be enlightened by God's Word (1:9) will become children of God, who is light (1:2.3.6; 1 Jn 1:5). Hence if the Johannine Jesus says: "I am the light of the world" (8:12), "I am the bread of life" (6:35), etc., these texts are not to be interpreted exclusively. Even the affirmation of Jesus: "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one come to the Father except through me" (14:6) does not mean that nobody can come to God except through explicit faith in Jesus. It means that Jesus is the revelation of the life of God the Father and no one can come to the Father except in a filial way. Jesus has manifested God as Father (14:7; cf also 1:18) and the appropriate way of relating to the Father is as sons and daughters.

The Johannine Jesus reveals the Father through his words and deeds (the signs and works) during his ministry and welcomes all who are open to God's word (whether they be Jews, Gentiles or

Samaritans) and reveals to them what it means to be children of God who is love.

The risen Jesus tells the disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love" (15:9) and he gives them the commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (15:12). And he loved them to the point of laying down his life for them (15:13; 1 Jn 3:16) so that they may have life in abundance (10:10). Such Christlike love is the criterion by which the true disciples of Jesus (13:34-35) and the genuine children of God can be recognized by all (cf. 1 Jn 4:7). Hence any one who loves generously and selflessly is a child of God who is Love, whether s/he be a Christian or Jew, Hindu or Muslim, Buddhist or Jain, Parsee or Sikh.

In fact, not only the ministry of Jesus but also the death of Jesus on the cross is a revelation of God's love for humankind (3:16; 17:26) "so that the scattered children of God may be gathered into one" (11:52). This unity is symbolized by the seamless and untorn tunic of Jesus (19:23-24) and by the coming of the disciples (men and women) and of soldiers to the crucified Jesus, highlighting thereby the universal dimension of his life-giving death.

The risen Jesus continues the gathering of his brothers and sisters, the children of God who is his Father and their Father (20:17). He frees them from their fears and doubts (20:18-29). Empowered by the Holy Spirit (20:22), the disciples are sent into the world to continue the universal life-living mission of Jesus: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (20:21). Like Jesus, they are to love, care and die for the sheep (21:15-19), both of the Christian fold and those "not of this fold" (10:16), and "gather" them so that all may have life in abundance (10:11).

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The Cosmic Dimension of New Humanity Pauline Perspective

Jacob Palliparambil

Paul envisaged a new humanity which has its foundation in the risen Jesus. Jesus is the saviour of the cosmos. "God has put all things under his feet". Christ is all in all". This is the logical thread running through this article.

Any talk on the new humanity in the Pauline system of thought has its point of departure in Christ Jesus "who descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:3-4). The new humanity has its origin, subsistence and finality in Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of the Church and the Universe: "And he (God) has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fill all in all" (Eph 1:22-23). The letter to the Colossians affirms more categorically: "Christ is all in all" (3:11b). So everything that can be spoken of the new humanity has to be closely and intimately linked to the person of Jesus Christ and his role as the cosmic Christ. Therefore, our consideration on the cosmic dimension of the new humanity also starts from an over-all view of Christ as the cosmic Christ as developed in the Pauline literature. We should also keep in mind that the term "cosmic" does not necessarily refer to nature or the physical universe as such, but to the environment in which the human lives and moves and where the history of humankind takes concrete form. Hence our approach to the cosmic dimension of the new humanity is primarily concerned with its universal and all embracing nature and function within the humanity.

Jesus Christ: the Kosmokrator

The title "Kosmokrator" given to Jesus Christ is a controversial one, because it may give the unwarranted impression that Jesus' redemptive

work is primarily addressed to nature and not to the humankind. The post-modern concern about the Ecology may have also contributed towards attributing to Jesus Christ the cosmic role and interpreting it in terms of nature and universe. The negative attitude of authors to this title attributed to Christ Jesus is well expressed by Markus Barth: "The talk of 'cosmic Christ' contradicts the intentions and witness of the whole New Testament or essential parts of it; therefore, a Christ-centered theology must abstain from statements that sound cosmological. Rather it must deal only with the salvation of individuals, the Church and society" ¹.

However, the recent doctoral thesis of Mathew V. Thekkekara on Col 3: 11b ("Christ is all in all") has shown in a masterly way that not only the Colossians, but also the early letters of Paul look to Jesus in relation to the redemption of the cosmos ². He is of opinion that one should not be prejudiced against this terminology applied to Jesus Christ and to its far-reaching implications for the theology of nature. The primary import of Jesus' work for humanity is not lost by this appellative, but it rather receives fullness and universality. The concluding remark of the author is enlightening: "In reference to Jesus Christ, we can say that Jesus is the definitive self-communication of God to human beings, and through them, to the whole cosmos. The whole cosmos forms a unity with the risen Jesus, so that his resurrection is the beginning of a divinization of the world. In the resurrection, Jesus of Nazareth becomes the cosmic Christ" ³.

In fact, Paul's thinking and reflection on Jesus Christ begins with the Risen Lord. The Risen Christ forms the focus and nucleus of his teachings on Jesus. Though he does mention about the earthly Jesus as "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4) and "descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3), yet he is not much concerned about the earthly and physical existence of Jesus of Nazareth (2 Cor 5:16). He is much more preoccupied with the Risen Lord, because he had met and experienced only the Risen Lord (1 Cor 15:8). His deep

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1. Markus Barth, "Christ and All Things," *Paul and Paulinism*. Essays in Honour of C.K. Barrett, eds. M.D. Hooker & S.G. Wilson, London, 1982, p. 160
 2. Mathew V. Thekkekara, *Christ is All and in All (Col 3: 11b): Its Christological, and cosmic, and ecclesial significance*, Bangalore, 1999.
 3. Mathew Thekkekara, *ibidem*, p. 154

experience of the Risen Lord led him to see the whole salvific plan of God for humanity in this light. He reflects on the past and future actions of God in light of the present event in which God has intervened by raising Jesus from the dead. Paul's reflection on the Risen Lord reaches its culmination, when he attributes to His death and resurrection universal significance. This has been achieved by calling Jesus with certain titles that are cosmic and universal in character.

Second/Last Adam

Paul calls the Risen Lord the second or last Adam. In the first Corinthians Paul explains in detail about the resurrection of Jesus and about the resurrection of the body of the faithful (15:1-58). In this chapter Paul attributes to Jesus Christ the title of Adam and compares Him to the first Adam, who is called "a living being", man from the earth: "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being, for all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (15:21-22). Later, he adds in the same vein: "Thus it is written, the first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven" (15:45-47). Further, in the letter to the Romans Paul tells us that the first Adam was the "type of the one who was to come" (Rom 5:14). Through these statements what Paul wants to tell us is this: The Risen Christ is the beginner of a new humanity just as the first Adam is considered the beginner of the old humanity of sin and death. Sin of the first man, and as its consequence death, entered into the realm of human existence and affected the whole humanity and the cosmos in which they move and live. It is therefore universal to all generations who come into this world and form part of the human race. In the same way, the last Adam, who is now risen from the dead, has brought life and is therefore the source of life to all who lived in the past, live in the present and will live in the future. He has also thereby affected the cosmos in which they live. Hence the effect of last Adam's resurrection does not effect just the persons who are baptized only, but the whole humanity as well. This point is brought to light by W.E. Orr and J.A. Walther in their commentary on 1 Corinthians: "There are two distinct possibilities in regard to life because of Christ: all people *will be made alive* because of Christ, or all people who belong to Christ *will be made alive*. The wording of Greek supports the first alternative, but elsewhere

Paul's theology suggest the second (e.g. Rom 6:5-11) - the resurrection achieved by Christ will be available for those who have related to him in a special way, as opposed to its automatic, universal applicability. In any case, the desolated condition of death, the human lot, is subject to removal because of the marvelous victory achieved through the human agency of Jesus Christ"⁴. Thus the title given to the Risen Christ by Paul brings to focus the universality of Jesus' resurrection-effect as the life-giving spirit. It is offered to the whole humankind, and thereby to the whole universe.

Not only the humankind, but also the whole cosmos is affected by the Risen Lord, the second Adam. This is to be gathered from the Bible and Jewish tradition regarding the effects of sin committed by Adam. In the book of Genesis we read: "cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you"(3:17b -18a). So also affirms the Jewish tradition that sin of Adam not only affected the humankind, but also the whole cosmos. Its aftermath has caused the entire universe negatively. For example we read in 4 Ezra 7:1ff.: "And when Adam transgressed my statutes, what had been made was judged. And so the entrances of this world were made narrow and sorrowful and toilsome". To this corresponds also the saying which is attributed to Rabbi Shemuel, which reads as follows: "Although things were created in their fullness, when the first man sinned they were corrupted, and they will not come back to their order before Ben Perez (the Messiah) comes" (Gen. Rab. 12:6)⁵. There was the belief among the Jewish people that sin of the first man affected also the cosmos and that it will be restored to the fullness and order, when the Messiah appears. Paul also has in mind the same idea of fall and restoration,, when he speaks of Christ as the last Adam in whom the whole creation is restored and integrated into the new humanity.

Paul in fact speaks of the whole creation in these terms when he writes of creation that is in travail and in expectation of freedom from bondage at the appearance of the sons of God: " For creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one

4. William E. Orr & James Arthur Walther, *I Corinthians*, New York, 1977, p. 332.

5. E. Kaesemann, *Commentary on Romans*, London 1973, p. 233

who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:19-21). Of course, Paul speaks here about the eschatological realization when the Lord will appear again, yet it alludes to the fact that the creation is eagerly waiting for the full manifestation of the children of God, which is already inaugurated by the resurrection of Christ Jesus. Christ as the last Adam is the origin and source of this new life of freedom to which the entire creation is longing with eager expectation.

The First Fruits of the resurrection

The Pauline letters refer to Jesus' resurrection as "the first fruits of those who have died" (1Cor 15:20). He means to say that Jesus' resurrection is the first one in the order of all those who are raised from the dead. That is the reason for him to write in vv.23-25 in the following manner: "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruit, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power". The idea of the first fruits invites us to think of Christ as beginner of the new humanity, which will be offered to God. "As the first products of the field were used in Jewish sacrificial tradition for special gifts to God that consecrated all the following produce, so the resurrection of Christ is evidence that all whose humanity he shared may share his resurrection".⁶ The process of the resurrection started in Christ Jesus does not end with that of the humanity as a whole, but it is to be understood as extended to the whole creation, since the Risen Christ is given the authority to destroy all rulers and authority that are inimical to God the Father before the full realization of God's Kingdom. The enemy includes also those who subjugate the creation and make it a slave of their whims and fancies. The creation which is subjected to decay and corruption should be first transformed, so that the Kingdom of God can be fully and perfectly offered to the Father (1 Cor 15: 27-28). This is even further clarified by the fact that the Risen Christ is constituted the Lord of everything by the Father.

The Christ as the Lord of the Universe

The title of the Lord (*Kyrios*) is applied to Jesus Christ and He is called the Lord constantly in the whole New Testament and in the letters of Paul. In the Pauline letters, we find that this lordship is

immediately connected to the exaltation and glorification of Jesus, to whom every thing is subjected. This theme is brought to light in the early letter of Paul to the Philippians and is developed in the Deutero-Pauline letters such as the Colossians and Ephesians.

In the letter to the Philippians, Paul quotes from a primitive Christological Hymn. The hymn which has been subjected to Pauline redaction and has been re-read according to his theological thinking about Christ, ends with this statement: "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10 -11). God the Father has exalted him as the Lord because He was obedient to the Father's will. The process of *kenosis* that He underwent was in perfect accordance with the will of the Father. As a result God put every being in heaven and on earth under his lordship. This constitution of Jesus as the Lord took place at the resurrection and then onwards he is master of the Universe, which includes humanity, creation and heavenly beings .

The letter to the Colossians is a masterpiece on Christ as the Lord of the universe and the humankind. Christ's role and involvement in humanity, church and universe is brought into light in this letter through various expressions. The risen Lord is called the image of God (1:15), the first-born from the dead (1:18), the first-born of all creation (1:15), the fullness of God (1:19). Above all, the key statement in 3:11 b that Christ is all and in all sheds light on Christ as the cosmic Christ, because the *panta*, "all" refers to everything that exists in the universe⁷. Therefore Christ is the Lord of all the existing things in the universe.

Paul affirms this faith about Christ in various parts of his letters through the use of the neuter of the adjective *pas*: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36); "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6); "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under

6. William E. Orr & James Arthur Walther, *ibidem*, p. 332.

7. Mathew Thekkekara, *ibidem*, p. 140-7

him, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:28); "He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself" (Phil 3:21); "He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things" (Eph 4:10). In the very letter to the Colossians, it is stated that it is through him all things came into existence and he is the one who holds all created things together (Col 1:16-17). Jesus Christ is the unifying force behind all the created world not only because they came into existence through him, but also because he is the one who reconciled all things to God the Father through his death and resurrection: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:19-20). "The unity and harmony of the cosmos are disturbed or even ruptured as presupposed here. In order to restore the cosmic order, reconciliation became necessary and was accomplished by the Christ-event. The universe has been reconciled in that heaven and earth have been brought back into their divinely created and determined order through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. Now the universe is again under its head and thereby cosmic peace has returned."⁸

In the letter to the Ephesians, the idea of the cosmic Christ is brought to perfection, when the author writes: "God put this power (the Holy Spirit) to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominions, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:20-23). Hence Jesus, risen from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, is not only the head of the church, the new humanity, but is also the Lord of the whole universe. Christ's role is a cosmic one. A new order, harmony and peace is established in the universe through him.

It is from this firm conviction that Paul starts to speak of the new humanity and its cosmic role. Paul puts into praxis this fundamental

8. Mathew Thekkekara, *ibidem*, p. 128

conviction, when he begins to preach the gospel and when he exhorts his churches to live accordingly. He envisions a new humanity which includes all and excludes none, not even the cosmos.

The New Humanity: a Cosmic Reality

The human after sin created barriers of separation in and around. Not only division in humanity through the barrier of languages, and therefore of communication (Gen 11: 19), but also an inner conflict and division within, so that some turn to others and to the world in a spirit of separation rather than communion with one another. Rather than asserting the common elements of unity between all humans in the universe and their essential oneness with the whole nature, they always seek causes and motives that divide them. Hence, there existed in the past, but is still existing, separation in humanity on account of nationality, race, social status, culture and gender. One of the strongest convictions of Paul, well established in the Risen Lord as the Cosmic Christ, is that all such barriers in humanity have been broken down and overcome by Christ. Both in missionary activities as a preacher of the Gospel and in the building up of a new humanity this fundamental conviction emerges again and again. He envisages a new humanity in Christ without any limitation of nationality, racism and cultural, social and gender differences. He does not mean that all these differences rooted in the lives of humans are abolished, so that there is only uniformed humanity everywhere, but that all the negative impacts of these differences that cause separation and division within humanity have been annulled and overcome. The natural human instinct to see everything and everybody as a separate entity different from oneself and as a threat to one's existence and living is by now transformed with their union with Christ and Christ's communicative presence in humanity. With the life giving presence of the Risen Christ, there is a new impetus in humanity, especially in those who are grafted to him through baptism, to seek what unites them to one another and to nature. They are no more alienated from one another through the national, racial, cultural, social and gender barriers and they no more consider nature, in which they live and move, a threat to their existence and fulfillment.

Missionary Praxis: Concern for the Gentiles

Paul's basic tenet of faith is that the whole human race is by now in a new phase of existence. This is translated into praxis by his

missionary endeavors that he undertakes for the sake of the Gentiles. He asserts again and again that he was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. As he explains to the Galatians about his call and mission, he writes unequivocally about it: "But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles" (1:15-16). The very purpose of his call and mission was in order to preach Jesus Christ and the new life He has brought to the Gentiles, who were considered outside the realm of the people of God. Therefore, most of his missionary activities will be directed primarily to the Gentiles. He will be writing later to the Romans that his mission to the Gentiles is "a priestly service of the gospel of God" and that he is sent "to win obedience from the Gentiles" (Rom 14: 18-19).

Paul was also equally convinced that it was God's own project in Christ with regard to the humanity. That is the reason why he claims at the beginning of most of the letters that he is called "by the will of God (*thelema tou Theou*)" (cfr. 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Col 1:1; Eph 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1). The Greek phrase *thelema tou Theou* expresses God's plan or project⁹ and in the context of Paul's call and mission it is always used in this meaning. God's plan or project concerns the salvation of the Gentiles and Paul is only an instrument used by God for this purpose. His duty consisted in preaching to the whole world. He is constantly on the move to fulfil this commission entrusted to him. As he believed in the imminent eschatological fulfillment, he wanted to reach out to as many people as possible. Hence he was a tireless traveller and missionary. The reason for such tireless missionary activity is carried out with an innate logic of his own. His logic is this: In order that people may believe, they have to hear; 'in order that they may hear, they must be preached to (Rom 10,:14-17). So Paul's duty was mainly centered on preaching the Gospel to Gentiles wherever they lived. He goes in search of them. He was not satisfied with preaching in certain areas of the Roman Empire alone. As he finishes preaching the gospel in the East of the Empire he desires to go to its extreme West, i.e., Spain (Rom 15:24): from Jerusalem and as far as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news

9. Jacob Palliparambil, *The Will of God in Paul - A Commitment to man*, Rome, 1986

of Christ. Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been preached so that I do not build on someone else's foundation" (Rom 15:19-20). His desire to go to new places where people who have not heard of Christ is on account of the fact that God's project concerning the Gentiles may be fulfilled as early as possible. Most probably Paul believed that when all the Gentiles have heard of Christ, then the End will come ¹⁰.

In the Primitive Church Paul will always be on the side of the Gentiles. The early Christian Church was not against accepting the Gentiles into their fold. However, they laid certain unwritten conditions for accepting them. It was nothing other than their acceptance of the Mosaic Law. They had to be circumcised first and also obey the Mosaic Law. It must have been the praxis in the pre-Pauline Church that the Gentiles who were baptized were pious and devout persons who had some kind of affinity with Jewish religion. The Acts of the Apostles mentions the reception the Centurion Cornelius and the Eunuch from Ethiopia into the Christian communion. Both these men were said to be devout and had some kind of knowledge of the Jewish laws and scriptures before they were baptized (Acts 8:26-38; 10:1-48). The later controversy about accepting Gentiles without circumcision and the mosaic law hints at the fact that the Jerusalem Church did feel reluctant to receive the purely and entirely immoral pagans into their fold without any such initiation (Acts 15:1-35; Gal 2:1-10).

All the theological efforts of Paul in his letters to the Galatians and Romans are meant to justify the acceptance of the Gentiles without circumcision into the Church. In the letter to the Galatians he has shown with scriptural foundation that the true descendants of Abraham are not those who are physically and racially rooted in him, but those who believe in Christ like Abraham who believed in the promises of God, completely trusting in His word with no other external evidence or guarantee for its fulfillment (Gal 3:15 - 4:7). In the Romans he has insisted that all, both Gentiles and Jews, have sinned against God and are destined for wrath of God (1:18-3,20). But now God offers righteousness to all irrespective of their natural belonging to one or other nation or race: "But, now, apart from the law, the righteousness

10. J. Munck, *Paulus and Heilgeschichte*, Copenhagen, 1954, p. 303.

of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:21-23). This offer of God to all men is pure gift and grace (Rom 3:24). This is the gospel which Paul is preaching and he is not all ashamed of it: "It is the power of God for salvation for everyone who has faith" (Rom 1:16)

Hence it is evident that for Paul the new humanity is one which is open to all, including the Gentiles. Their acceptance into the new community is not a concession given to them on human basis, but is a right which they have on account of God's plan in Jesus Christ. When Paul speaks of the Jews as a people hardened in their hearts towards this new project of God in Christ, he is still hopeful that they will one day realize God's plan and repent and accept Jesus Christ. Then they will have equal access to the new humanity (Rom 9:1- 11,36). He is not excluding them from this new humanity in Christ, But his insistence on his preaching to the Gentiles is due to the simple conviction that the plan of God in Christ Jesus is not merely addressed to the Jewish People, thereby narrowed down to a single nation and race, but to the whole humanity, and, therefore, is universal in nature. Paul will call to the mind of the christian communities that this universality is not merely a lip -service, but a concrete reality, lived in their community setting and reality.

The New Humanity: a lived Experience

The formation of a new community made up of the Jews and Gentiles was a concrete reality in the early church. With all the difficulties that might have existed and were exaggerated, there were communities of believers who came from different nations, races, social and cultural milieus in the early church. This is what the letter to Ephesians point out so emphatically, when the author of this letter writes: "So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcised, by those who speak of themselves' as the circumcised made in the flesh by human hands - remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. By now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (2:11-14). In different

texts Paul speaks of this unity of different groups which gives us some clues to the oneness and unity of this new people of God. In all these passages, Paul tries to instill into the mind and heart of christians that all kinds of separation among them are overcome and there is to be an existential unity among them.

Body of Christ

Paul called the christian community body of Christ (1 Cor 6:15-18; 10: 6-22; 12:12-31; Rom 12:5-8; Col 1:18-19; Eph 1:22-28; 4:4.11-12.15-16). It is not our aim to study all these texts in detail nor to develop the implication of this symbol used for the church. What is relevant to us is 1 Cor 12:13, where Paul observes: "For in one Spirit we were baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slave or free-for we were all made to drink of one Spirit". In the context of 1 Cor 12: 12-31, this statement is very important and significant with regard to the universality of the new humanity. The Apostle is here speaking of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to each member of the community. All are given, irrespective of their natural belonging to a particular nation or social status, because in baptism they have become one in the Spirit. All the gifts are given for particular functions in the community and for the growth of the whole community. The Spirit does not make any distinction between them, when it endows gifts on them. In this instance the exhortation of Paul to the community seems to be not to make any distinction about the gifts of the Spirit on account of the persons who possess them. Just as all gifts are important for the growth of community, so also the bearers of these gifts are also equal and important. It implies that the community must not discriminate the gifts on the basis of the religious, national or social background of the member, who possesses the gift of the Spirit. Those christians who came from the Jewish upbringing, Gentiles who came from a very immoral living, slaves who were ignorant and poor and free men who enjoy liberty have all equally a share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, because they belong to Christ. All these gifts are to be respected. The community members should never judge the gifts on the basis of the persons who possess them

One in Christ Jesus

In the letter to the Galatians, while Paul is speaking about the new dispensation in Christ Jesus, he speaks once again of the oneness of the new humanity: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have

clothed yourselves into Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are in Christ Jesus" (3:27-28). He is addressing to the new humanity that is already a concrete reality actualized in the Galatian churches. As pointed out by the authors, this text is to be read in the context of the baptismal liturgy ¹¹. But what is important to us is the fact that Paul is speaking here in the context of the Galatians who were led astray by the Judaizers who demanded from them circumcision as a necessary condition to be saved. Paul on the other hand is showing that there is no merit to circumcision, because God has offered to all salvation through faith. When we read this text in this larger context, we have to understand that Paul is bringing to their attention that they are effectively a new humanity, although they come from different religions, nations, social and gender status. Because of their baptism into Christ, they have put on Jesus Christ. The presence of Jesus Christ in their lives has made them one. All of them irrespective of their origin are one. What is noteworthy here is that Paul brings in also the gender distinction as obsolete in the new humanity. The difference of the gender is a natural trait of humanity. It does not mean that this external difference disappears within the new humanity, but that they have lost all importance before God for salvation. They should not rely on any thing external to determine the salvation which God offers to them. What Paul at the last analysis advocates is this: all sorts of distinction based on nationality, religion, social state and gender have been abolished. The christian community should not be led astray by these distinctions and differences that exist in the old humanity. The circumcision and the law of Moses insist on such dividing factors and they only succumb to such old practices, when they receive circumcision.

Christ is all in all

It is in the letter to the Colossians that the universal nature of the existing new humanity is more clearly brought out by Paul. In Col 3:11 he makes this audacious statement: "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all in all". This forms part of the exhortation which the author is giving to the community, In this section

11. Mathew Thekkekara, *Ibidem*, p. 73

he has already made appeal to them to put to death whatever is earthly and strip themselves of the old self with all its evil practices. Once again we have reference to the baptism which they received, when they have put on Jesus Christ. A radical renewal of the person has already taken place. Now they have to live according to this new life, for this renewal is not yet fully achieved by them. In daily praxis of their christian life, they must not turn to the old self which advocated distinction of their fellow-men into different classes on account of their birth and social standing. This is to be abolished among them. This is a call to the universal brotherhood on account of Jesus Christ who is all in all.

Among all the texts in Paul, where there is a reference to the universal character of the new humanity, this text stands out for its detailed enumeration of the barriers that separate humanity into various groups and parties.. Mathew Thekkekara rightly points out the relative negation and the literary style "merism" used by the author ¹². Relative negation is employed to give more emphasis on the positive affirmation of the second clause, i.e., Christ is all in all. This would mean that since Christ is all in all, there is not a single reason for the humanity to be separated in any way. No distinction at all for whatsoever reason!. The literary style of "merism" expresses two terms, usually contrary, to allude to a totality. In Col 3:11 there are four such pairs as: Greeks and Jews, the Circumcised and the Uncircumcised, Barbarians and Scythians, and Slaves and the Free. Through these four pairs the totality of all racial, religious, cultural and social differences respectively are brought into focus over against the final and only totality, which is Jesus Christ who is all in all ¹³. The christian community at Colossae is asked to be aware of this new reality in Christ, which should lead them to negate all kinds of differences which the 'old man' tries to impose on them on account of their origin, birth or environment.

Conclusion

Paul envisaged a new humanity which has its existential foundation in the Risen Lord, who embraces the whole humanity and all that exists in the universe. Although the Risen Lord's redemptive work is directed to the humankind, yet it has its influence on the cosmos,

12. Mathew Thekkekara, *Ibidem*, p 55-56. 60-63

13. Mathew Thekkekara, *ibidem*, p. 84-102

which is the environment in which humans live and move and create history. This cosmic aspect of the Risen Lord is a basic tenet of Pauline Christology, which cannot be ignored. The new humanity's origin and basis is the cosmic Christ, to whom they are united as members of one body. Therefore, the new humanity by its very nature is cosmic in character and function. It is in the eternal plan of God to unite the whole humankind into one community in Christ Jesus. It was already a reality at least in its nucleus form in the early church, in spite of the difficulties that existed on account of the divisions based on nationality, religion, culture, social and gender differences. In those times the negative aspects of these differences were felt and experienced in the day to day life in all walks of life. The hostilities not only between Jews and Gentiles, but also between all kinds of groups were eliminated in the new reality of the Church.

It has to be always the effort of those who are united to Christ in baptism to focus their attention on this aspect of their faith. They are called upon to build a community where all men and women without any regard for their nationality, race, cast, social status and gender will have equal rights and privileges. The call for treating all equally is not a mere political agenda, but an inherent right and duty of every one who is forming part of the new humanity in Christ. Separation on the basis of any count is to be disregarded and eliminated from this new people. Discrimination on the basis of either color, creed or caste can never be tolerated in the new humanity, because it would be disowning its own very nature and function in the universe.

The new humanity in Christ, which is the church, has also a duty towards nature. Nature should be fostered as a source of life and it must be used for the meaning ful purpose of humanity. The appearance of the sons of God will liberate it from slavery, if these sons of the new humanity will treat it with respect and not abuse it for self-satisfaction and self-gratification. The destruction of nature through wars and weapons of destruction, such as the lethal nuclear arms, is totally alien to the new humanity. There should be harmony and peace among all humans in the world and with nature in which they live and find their self-realization

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The Church Must Change to Survive the Twenty-first Century

J. Constantine Manalel

Introduction

1.1. The Second Vatican Council was an epoch-making religious event of the twentieth century. The preparations for the Council took three years and a half after its announcement by the blessed Pope John XXIII on January 25, 1959.

1.2. More than two thousand and three hundred bishops from all the countries of the world participated, each of whom had a personal theologian with him. Besides, there were four hundred experts, called *periti*, in all the subjects concerned. There were also representatives of lay women and men as well as specially invited observer-delegates from non-Catholic religious bodies.

1.3. Thus the Council was unprecedented in the history of the Church as regards its attendance, as regards the world-wide attention it attracted and as regards the favourable reaction it aroused from the world outside, including non-believers.

1.4. The Council lasted from October 11, 1962 to December 8, 1965.

I. Vatican II only a beginning

2.1. The achievements of the Council too was quite considerable not only in quantity and extent, but also in quality and acceptance.

2.2. About a century before the Council there had been various movements within the Church, such as Biblical, Ecumenical, Liturgical and Theological as well as forward trends in Moral, Social and Scientific spheres for updating the Church and bridging the gap between the

Church and the world. The Council, from the start, gave added fillip to all the movements, most of whose leaders were already among the Council's experts.

2.3. The Council courageously took up the question of the religious existence in the modern secular world in view of the Church, of World Religions and of the World as a whole.

2.4. The Council without swerving from its faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and universal saviour and in the Catholic Church in its apostolic fullness, acknowledged every one's right to organise one's life in accordance with one's deeper convictions. So no one should be compelled to be a member of any particular religion. This does not imply any indifference to seeking or searching out the truth but is an acknowledgement of the dignity of every human person.

2.5. For the first time in the history of the Church the Council abandoned certain claims of the Catholic Church, which it had been holding for centuries. With every abandoning of a claim on one side the Council made an affirmation on the other side. They are the following:

2.5.1. The Catholic Church's claim to be the only true religion was abandoned and at the same time a core of authentic religiousness in other religions was recognised.

2.5.2. Its claim to be the only true Church of Christ was abandoned and the Christianness of other Churches was recognised.

2.5.3. Its claim to be the pure and unsullied embodiment of Christianness was abandoned while what was maintained is that the uniqueness of Christ's Church and the unique Church mystery is in the Catholic Church, though veiled and ever open to further clarification: "*Ecclesia semper reformanda.*"

2.5.4. The Council also abandoned the ecclesial claim of its hierarchy but attributed this ecclesial character to the people of God, for whose sake the hierarchy holds and fulfils a ministry of service.

2.5.5. The Council, through its teaching on Episcopal Collegiality in relation to Papal Primacy has brought about a pluriform unity in the Church instead of a pyramidal hierarchy and has effected a revision in the conception of the local Church and universal Church.

2.5.6. Finally the Council has put an end to clerical monopoly of

the liturgy by declaring it a community celebration in which every one has his/her part to play and function to fulfil.¹

2.6.1. Before the Council religious exclusivism held sway. With the Council the Church was opened up to the whole world as never before. All considered, the Council far exceeded the goal set before it, as *Aggiornamento* (up-dating) by Pope John and *Renновamento* (renewal) by Pope Paul VI. It was not merely the one and the other, but it turned out to be a revolution of thought and ideas firmly based on the sources.

2.6.2. "No one", as Cardinal Heenan has put it, "can doubt that a beginning of far-reaching importance has been made and that the Church will never retrace the path it has chosen... People without sealed minds would not fail to recognise the changes."² Edward Schillebeeckx OP., one of the eminent periti of the Council wrote: "In view of the Church's past the practical consequences of the five basic affirmations for the future of the Church are really incalculable. In my view they will be of far reaching significance for the future of the Church.... If we add to this the new openness to the world and a more sensitive awareness of the religious and transcendental character of God's Kingdom Vatican II cannot possibly leave the face of the earth unaffected at least if it does not remain a mere document but becomes a living reality among Christians."³ Oscar Cullmann, the noted Protestant Theologian and observer-delegate to the Council summed up their thoughts thus: "The hopes of Protestants for Vatican II have not only been fulfilled; but the Council achievements have gone far beyond what was believed possible."⁴

3. In spite of it all Vatican II was but a beginning

It has laid only the ground work for a re-appraisal of the Church. Much remains to be done, much to be clarified and completed regarding the meaning and extent of changes it wanted to bring about in the Church.

3.1. First, almost all of the Council's documents bear the mark of compromise with a view to pacifying a small conservative minority in

1 cf. E. Schillebeeckx OP, *Vatican II: The Real Achievement*. Sheed and Ward, Stag books. 1966, pp. 53-82.

2 Xavier Rynne, *Fourth Session*, Faber & Faber, London, 1966, p. 252.

3 E. Schillebeeckx OP, *ibid.* pp. 80-81.

4 Xavier Rynne, *ibid.* p. 264.

the Council, though those who can read between the lines would easily detect the mind of the Council. We have a conspicuous example in its clear teaching on Episcopal Collegiality. Leaving Vatican I's statement on papal primacy as it is, Vatican II declared collegiality of Bishops (between themselves and in hierarchic communion with the Pope) but neither affirms nor denies collegiality of the Pope as the chief pastor of the Church. There had been made a distinction between the Pope as Chief Pastor of the Church and 'Pope as the Head of the Episcopal College, but the Council document undoubtedly approved the Bishops' Collegiality while remaining silent on that of the Pope. This does not at all mean that the above two titles of the Pope are different (though there was an explanatory note that they were). But the Council fathers are said to have had not the slightest intentional reference to the explanatory note.⁵ This evidently shows that the Council had not the last word on the matter as a whole.

3.2. Secondly, the Council fathers seemed to have paid no sufficient attention to the real danger lurking in the Council's compromising attitude shown in its statements towards the conservative minority, the core of whom were ensconced in the Roman Curia. The announcement by Pope John of Vatican II was not kindly taken by the Curia and so they tried to rigidly control the Pope's initiative. It is history that they miserably failed. But they have not been sitting on their hands.

3.3. Thirdly, the Council itself has already spoken of its limitations.

3.3.1. In its declaration on 'Religious freedom' the Council says that it "searches into the sacred traditions and doctrines of the Church - the treasury out of which the Church *continually brings forth new things* that are in harmony with the things that are old"⁶.

3.3.2. Again the Church guards the heritage of God's word and draws from it moral and religious principles *without always having at hand the solution to particular problems.*⁷

3.3.3. So both the renewal of the Church and explication of its doctrines are a continual process by which the Church passes from a less complete understanding of the word of God to its more complete

⁵ cf. E. Schillebeeckx OP. *ibid.* pp. 16-17.

⁶ para 3.

⁷ Church in the Modern World, Part III, Ch-3 no. 33, para 3.

understanding, without ever being able to understand fully what it possesses.⁸

II. Urgent need for Vatican III (Kingdom I)

4. Retreat from Vatican II

4.1. Just at the conclusion of the Council on Monday, December 6, 1965 Pope Paul VI started reform of the Curia beginning with the actual reform of the Holy office. The name Holy office was dropped and it was renamed the "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). The new office would have the Pope as its head and a cardinal as its secretary. It was to be in future more concerned with promoting theological investigations than with heresy-hunting; with respect to authors and persons who might be denounced for heterodoxy, they would have the right to defend themselves according to accepted and published norms and no action has to be taken against anybody without informing the local bishop.⁹

4.2. Things went on pretty well as envisaged by the Council almost to the end of Pope Paul VI's time. The Roman Curia tried to follow the directions of the Synod of Bishops which had to advise the Pope and take appropriate decisions together with him concerning the universal Church. With the angelic figure of Pope John Paul I the hope was brighter as what he did in the short period of one month was both significant and symbolic.

4.3. But during the time of the present Pope the Church at the centre started retreating from the teachings of the Council. As the reform of the Curia was not followed up, the Curia slowly regained predominance especially since the Pope has been following his itinerary and the Synod of Bishops, few and far between, became a matter of routine. Anyway, all that remains thinly veiled. Even one of our bishops, who should be in the know of things and is chairman of the Doctrinal Commission, C.B.C.I., when asked, could not furnish any details concerning the present state of affairs at the centre. The Synod of Bishops was meant to be a "structure of global participation in policy-shaping and decision-making", but it still remains a consultative body and the one-man-rule which it was meant to replace continues to this day.

⁸ cf. Xavier Rynne, *ibid.* p. 234.

⁹ *ibid.* pp.230-231.

4.4 One can gauge the extent to which the retreat was made with what has been happening in the C.D.F. Pope Paul VI had Cardinal Ottaviani, the then secretary of the Holy Office, sent to head the new Episcopal commission for advising the Pope on birth control. But the present incumbent in his place was confirmed by the present Pope as prefect of CDF in spite of his comments highly derogatory to Vatican II. CDF's questioning of some of the best theologians and its trying to silence them by demotion, censures and excommunications are all of recent history. It still continues to discourage other theologians and dissuade them in many ways, both by covert and overt means, from thinking anew or ahead of the times. It is reported that records are being kept by it (as of criminals in the police dept) of doctrinal deviations of theologians teaching in pontifical institutes. It is a wonder that the Curial officials never learn their lesson from the innumerable sins of commission of their hoary past. How many geniuses were nipped in the bud! how many saints were tortured and killed though some afterwards canonised! how much light and life of the spirit extinguished! Will it all be atoned for by the humble and sincere confession of the present Pope?

4.5. Pope John Paul II is said to have gone down in history for his courageous Encyclical *Ut unum sint* which is an invitation to all Christians to engage with him "in a patient and fraternal dialogue" on the primacy and its ministry of unity. The Encyclical was given in St. Peters on 25 May 1995. But nothing seems to have happened in between. Where has the enthusiasm shown by non-Catholic Christians at the end of Vatican II gone! Would it be wrong to say that the retreat from Vatican II by the present Pope and his Curia has deadened it all?

5. Horizons to be broadened and Vision to be widened

5.1. It is true that Vatican II tried to bring about a fundamental change in the Church, both as regards its attitude towards itself and as regards its outlook on the world, including other Churches and religions. But the full changes envisaged by the Council had to be clarified beyond doubt and broadened and harmonised.

5.2. In a world where individual rights are emphasised, inter relationships are forgotten. Individuals, unaware of their inter-relationships may be thrown off balance and lose all sense of direction unless they are consciously rooted in God who is the source of all relationships. Without this fundamental rooting most men and women

live only for the present. They have no overall view of life, no world vision. Such a day-to-day life leads one to all sorts of selfish motives and gains, of expediencies and compromises. They are blind to the goodness of persons and things. Their measure of a person or thing is their own pleasure or gain. Their judgements are marred, wrong decisions are taken and the world order is upset.

5.3.1. The whole universe, every being and every thing in it, you and I, including the whole humankind are God's continuous work and word. It is not that God created it all and left it to mend itself. God continues to sustain it. Similarly God said it and continues to say it. It is God's word, God's message to us. God has not stopped speaking to us through the word and work that is God's creation.

5.3.2. Modern science has discovered the wonderful unity amidst the infinite diversity of the universe. Even the distant stars have contributed to the building up of our bodies. Everything from a tiny particle of sand on earth to the giant stars are all made up of atoms or their still tinier constituents which are all ultimately reduced to energy. So we are all of the same make-up.

5.4 God entered history. The immaterial, the eternal Son of God entered matter and became flesh. So all matter is kith and we humans are not merely kith but also kin.

5.5. All the above considerations including those that follow lead to the urgent and immediate need for a General Council in this Jubilee year 2000. It must be fully representative not only of the Catholic Church as a whole, but also of other Christian Churches, all religions and the whole world including non-believers, I mean fully representative of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ. Everybody will have his/her contribution towards the enrichment of others. The Council should concern itself with what unites humans and the universe of things rather than with what divides them.

III. New Awareness Created

A. God

6.1. All our discussion has to begin from our inadequate concept of God (excuse the word for the Ultimate Reality that is the Divine). We have to acknowledge that God is absolutely incomprehensible to us. There has not been any theologian presumptuous enough to deny this. "No one has ever seen God" (Jn 1:15). No human, no created

being can know 'what God is'. The most we can know is 'what God is not'. Is God a person? Is God personal? or apersonal? God transcends all our categories. It would be idiotic to identify any human concept of God with God. Classic approaches to the Divine were through *affirmatio*, *negatio* and *eminentia*. But of these three, only *negatio* is legitimate. Even the word God is symbolic.

6.2.1. The Bible says. "God created (the hu)man in his own image" (Gen 1:27). Humans, in turn, in their utter ignorance, have been making the Divine in their own image. So, as men and women pick and choose according to their likes and dislikes, according to their predilections, God has been conceived as choosing some and rejecting others, fighting on the side of one people to defeat another people, getting disappointed with and annoyed at all that has been created and destroying them except a handful and so on in that flippant way.

6.2.2. The Jews believed that they were the chosen people of God and deserved preferential treatment from God (as do some Christians today). But Amos, God's prophet, retorts: "Are not you and the Cushites all the same to me, children of Israel? - declares Yahweh. Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Aramaeans from Kir?" (9:7). Prophet Isaiah is equally emphatic about the love that God has for Egypt and Assyria who were enemies of Israel: "That day Israel will make a third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing at the centre of the world, and Yahweh Sabaoth will bless them in the words: "Blessed be my people Egypt, Assyria my creation and Israel my heritage" (19:24-25). It would be quite unreasonable to distinguish between Isaiah's 'my people', 'my creation', 'my heritage'. The infinite love that God is is so incomprehensible that it not only looks but *is really unique* in every case whether the object of love is an individual or a community, a person or a thing. But we human beings are often so selfish as to have something of our own that others do not have, to have special consideration, to have preferential treatment. We may not be fully satisfied even if we know that God's treatment is special and unique in every case. "God does not show favouritism" (1 Pet 1:16) – God who "causes the sun to rise on the bad as well as the good and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike" (Mt 5:45-46). No thought or word can be attributed to God, that does not in the least harmonize with the infinite love and compassion that God is. But even that, however exalted, can only be symbolically and analogically applied to God.

6.3. Does it all mean that we should stop speaking about God? Definitely not. We cannot but continue to think and speak about God in our own limited way as God is the ultimate reality and the ground of our being and both our beginning and our end in whom 'we live and move and exist' (Acts 17:28). What we have to do is to try our best to know and speak about God *less and less inadequately*.¹⁰

B. A Saving Factor

7. There is a saving factor as regards the absolute incomprehensibility of God.

7.1.1. "Every one who loves God", says St. John, "is a child of God and knows God... because God is love" (1 Jn 4:7-8). The two affirmations herein contained, namely, that we can know God and that God is love, form part of the greatest of God's revelations in history and give an insight into the Divine in the most intelligible language possible to humans (and mark: this does not at all contradict what has been said above, viz. the absolute incomprehensibility of God).

7.1.2. As to the first affirmation that we can know God if we love God, this knowing is not notional or intellectual, but mystical which can hardly be expressed in human language, but is only experienced. One of the greatest mystics, St. John of the Cross says, "Contemplation is mystical theology which theologians call secret wisdom and which, St. Thomas says, is communicated and infused into the soul through love".¹¹

7.1.3. "God is love". This is the most intelligible of God's revelation to humans, most illuminating, most reassuring, most exhilarating. It is not merely that God has love as we do, nor is it merely that God is loving as we are. St. Paul's hymn to love (1 Cor 13) touches but its fringes. Considered in itself, love has no limits, it is goodness with out blemishes, it is both pure and purifying, perfect and perfecting, enjoying and enjoyable, beautiful and attractive, ever-expanding and ever-deepening; it is always relating, interconnecting, all-embracing, self-giving. Love creates life and promotes its growth; without love it withers away. The whole creation, the whole universe is the fruit of love. It is love that preserves it, sustains it, provides every thing for its well-being

10. cf. "Nine ways not to talk about God", Raimon Panikkar *Cross Currents* Summer 1997, p. 149-153.

11. cf. *The Dark Night*, 2,17,2 as quoted in the *New Dictionary of Theology* Glazier, 1997, p. 693.

and maintenance. Love transcends all loneliness, separation, discrimination and division as it inter-relates every thing, every one. Love makes every one free and the freedom it gives is not that narrow individualistic, selfish sort. It expands and deepens the relationships in creatures into ever-widening inter-relationships. The more one is freed by love the more one is prepared to give one-self to others; the more one is afire with life-giving love the more one will risk one's life for others. This is supremely illustrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ. "No one can have greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends", said Jesus and he prayed even for his executioners just as he lay dying on the cross: "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:24). This is the litmus test of genuine love.

7.2. Jesus wants us to be perfect, to be merciful, to set no limits to our own love, as God is perfect, merciful and sets no bounds to God's own. Jesus distinguishes what is good from what is merely right. Duty is not enough. Duty obeys rules, but love grasps opportunities. Duty acts under constraints, but love is spontaneous and therefore gracious. Duty expects to be recompensed but love expects nothing in return. To love like that is to be sons and daughters of God.¹²

7.3 But the love that God is, far transcends all that has been said about it. Still it enhances our inadequate understanding of God's Kingdom which is the Kingdom of love.

C. The Kingdom of God

8.1. The core of Jesus' proclamation is the Kingdom of God. It is the main concern of all his words and deeds and of his whole life. It is the sum total of his Gospel. The theme of the Kingdom is so often repeated (about 90 times in the synoptics) and so much emphasised that a cursory reading of the gospels will convince any one of its supreme importance. "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel." (Mk 1:15)

8.2. The content of this symbolic expression of the Kingdom is the unconditional and universal love of God as the loving Parent of all humans, of all creation. It calls for our loving response of trusting surrender; that is repentance.

12. cf. my article in *Jeevadhara*, no. 158, p. 138.

8.3. Hence the Kingdom is neither eschatological nor apocalyptic though its full flowering points to an unpredicted future. It is being realised here and now however imperfectly. It does not lie hidden for the future, but is a present reality gradually becoming visible as we respond in love, solidarity and radical openness as a result of which all kinds of discrimination among humans on account of caste and class, colour and gender, creed and ritual disappear, all boundaries separating them vanish and all divisions are bridged. The Kingdom comes 'among you' (Lk 17:21), and is 'within you' (ib.) and it 'grows' (Mk 4:30-32) as we make progress in our response.¹³

D. The Essential Requisite for the Kingdom

9.1. As Jesus is most explicit in his teaching about the Kingdom, so is he also in his teaching about the love and service by which it is to be realised. The people of Jesus' time were looking forward to their liberation through an outpouring of power from somewhere. But Jesus rejected outright all such power and substituted loving service in its place, since in every power there is implicit subjection, suppression and domination of some kind. Every power corrupts and creates structures of unfreedom. It is only love that frees and loving service that relates to others and unites both. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of love and service. Jesus' rejection of power and affirmation of service in its stead is as explicit and emphatic as is his proclamation of the Kingdom of God so that there could be no doubt about it left in the minds of his hearers.

9.2. Jesus not merely substituted loving service in the place of power, but revolutionised the very idea of power, or better, authority: "You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them and great men make their authorities felt. Among you this is not to happen, no. Any one who wants to become great among you must be your servant and any one who wants to become first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:25-28). The fact that this teaching is repeated in different words on different occasions at least twice in each of the synoptic gospels (Mt 18: 1-5; Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48//Mt as above; Mk 10: 42-45; Lk 22:25-27) and in John in

13. cf. "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society", George M. Soares-Prabhu SJ in *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*. Ed. By D.S. Amalorpavadaes. NBCLC 1981, p. 590.

the form of a parable in action at the last supper in the place of the institution of the Eucharist (13: 2-15) shows how much importance Jesus attached to it in the life of his disciples for the promotion of the Kingdom of God which is the sum of his Gospel.¹⁴

9.3. Srisavitha, a writer, born of Hindu parents, says in her own way with great insight what Christ means to her: "Jesus Christ, as I see, is the finest and complete personification of love. To follow Jesus one need not do anything but to love all his creation... Any one who has the growing feelings of love becomes the beloved child of Christ whether one adores Him or not, whether one belongs to Christianity or not. I perceive in this way: The Kingdom of Christ is the greatest one reaching far and wide, every nook and corner, not only of places but also of minds of persons living in the universe."¹⁵

9.4 There have been theologians who would, in concurrence with the hierarchy, find proofs from Scripture, as George M. Soares-Prabhu SJ said "for a ready-made model of the Church finished down to its last tittle detail where pope, bishops, male priest, deacon, sacraments are all seen 'immediately' and 'directly' instituted by Christ".¹⁶ Today with the increased knowledge of the Bible and allied sciences, Bible scholars could affirm that "Jesus had a vision, explicit or implicit, of a new society, though he offered no blueprint for it."¹⁷

9.5. In Jesus' vision the Kingdom of God was the new society for the promotion of which he trained and chose from among his disciples a core group. But Jesus was ever insisting by word and deed and the example of his life that those who want to be great among them (different from all other societies) must be their servant and those who want to be first must be their slaves. A slave in the ancient world was legally considered no person at all who could, therefore, have no personal end to achieve. Jesus contrasts the position of the secular ruler with that of the ecclesial office-bearer. The former is characterised by self-assertion and self-aggrandisement imposing his will upon others, the latter by self-denial and self-abasement enduring the imposition of the will of others.

9.6. *The power of the keys, that of binding and loosing, and that of*

14. cf. my article, *Jeevadhara* 58. pp. 286-301.

15. *Jeevadhara* 171, pp. 207-8.

16. cf. George Soares, *ibid.* pp 580-581.

17. cf. *ibid.*

feeding the sheep are all to be obviously interpreted in the light of the above teaching and exercised accordingly. Such power, if severed from the community of the Church, loses all its meaning. It is always a power (serving) *within* and not (lording it) *over* the Church.¹⁸

9.7. If one thinks attentively and deeply about Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom and its essential requisite of loving service one would never fail to see that the latter is the only way and the divine way of promoting the Kingdom. All men and women whether they profess any religion or no religion belong to God's Kingdom. But one thing is sure: if the core group of Jesus Christ's disciples have had no other interest than to love and serve others by being their servants and slaves, there would have been nothing in the way of these others knowing and acknowledging the gospel of the Kingdom. Initiative should have been taken by the Church in welcoming and treating all humans without exception as brothers and sisters.

IV. Church and Kingdom

A. The Church found failing

10.1. It is very surprising that, though the Kingdom of God with love and service as its essential requisite (response) is the sum of Jesus' teaching and his entire life, yet what came out after his death and resurrection was the Church, forming and acting as a privileged group and gradually separating themselves from the Jewish community and then from the rest of the world considered as gentiles outside the fold.

10.2. It seems that the history of the later Church from the 4th century onwards witnessed a gradual abandoning of the essential (for what is more essential than the Kingdom?), or rather, a passing from the primary to the secondary requirements of the gospel. It went so far as to block the way to the Kingdom:

First by *discriminating* in favour of 'Christians' against 'non-Christians'¹⁹ (which term implies denial of the Church's faith in Christ as relating to every human).

Secondly by *ruling* instead of serving. This has been the greatest scandal of the Church and the most patent betrayal of the gospel.

18. cf. my article, *ibid.* pp. 289-90.

19. cf. Raimond Panikkar, 'Christians and so-called "Non-Christians"' in *Cross Currents*, Summer-Fall 1972. pp.281-306.

10.3.1. It would be worthwhile to note the sea change that came about in the practice of the most explicit teaching of Jesus about authority. After Jesus' death on the cross and after his resurrection, Peter as head of the core group of disciples comes into the picture. He is never seen to have asserted his authority. Even in the Jerusalem 'Council', though he is reported to have spoken first, the final verdict seems to have been left to James. In the case of finding a substitute for Judas Iscariot, Peter having broached the subject, leaves the rest to the community and he does not even select from the two names proposed, but has it drawn by lots. Later when the over zealous Paul opposed him to his face he rather kept silence. Thus for the first three centuries of persecution the Church tried to keep up more or less the spirit of Christ.

10.3.2. In the early Church "every where in each generation and in the four spheres of faith, worship, apostolate and social life of the Church (there was) a union between the hierarchical structure and the communal exercise of all Church activities. The laity took an active part in the life of the Church as a whole...In fact the whole Church community, the laity especially took part in the election of bishops and choice of ministers. They supplied information for Councils and shared in the institution of those customs by which the various communities to a great extent regulated their own lives."²⁰

10.3.3. But from the time of Constantine the Roman Emperor who put an end to the persecutions against Christians and gave freedom to the Church, degeneration set in. That freedom eventually happened to be fetters with the largesse of political power and privileges to the pope down to the ordinary clergy who could hardly resist the temptation to worldly power and earthly splendour. It is the nature of such power that, once entrenched in the hearts of humans, it is extremely difficult to get it uprooted. As a rule it remains true even to this day, despite Vatican Council's confession and its return to the gospel idea of authority as service. Corruption of authority led the Church later into simony, crusades, inquisitions, witch-hunting which resulted in inhuman cruelties such as torture, hanging, and burning at the stake. Among the victims were, for example, Joan of Arc (1412-1498) who led French armies to victory at Orleans, and Savonarola (152-1498), a Dominican priest equally holy and the Leader of Florence.

20. Yves Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, Chapman, London 1965, p. 43.

10.3.4. In the Middle Ages corruption of power reached such a pitch that it became in Congar's words, *the direct opposite of the Gospel principle*—“not to rule but to serve”. Pope Gregory VII's principle was “not to serve but to reign” — (“church is not a servant but a queen”). According to *Dictatus Papae* (Gregory VII) “I (the Pope) can be judged by no one. I have never erred and will never err. I alone can make and unmake bishops, enact laws, call Councils. Duly ordained I am undoubtedly made a saint by the merits of St. Peter.²¹ It sounds so ludicrous at least to those who know history. There have been Popes judged by Councils for their errors, e.g. Pope Vigilius was in 553 excommunicated and Pope Honorius II was in 680 condemned as heretic. During the Western Schism rival popes were deposed and new pope installed in their place. Series of popes (and also Councils) over the period of about six centuries were guilty of teaching erroneous doctrines such as ‘No salvation outside the Church’, ‘Suspects of heresy should be tortured’²². Gregory XVI and Pius IX condemned freedom of conscience as an ‘execrable error’ and ‘delirious ravings’.²³ As for ordination of bishops by popes: the invariable custom prevailing in the early Church was that each church community, the laity especially, took part in the choice and election of bishops.

10.3.5. The point at issue here is how the conception and exercise of power in the Church have been in keeping with the most explicit teaching of Jesus. If it was the direct opposite in the Middle Ages, how is the Rome-dominated hierarchical, clerical Church of today different from it? Is not the present power structure at the centre and, for that matter, in most of the dioceses, an imperial and feudal model of the European society of yesterday? Is it in any way consonant with the Church which was meant to be essentially a communion or communion of communions. Rome's making laws for the universal Church must come as a result of consultation with and inputs from the whole Church, including the Laity who form the vast majority of its members. This is true also of dioceses *mutatis mutandis*. Otherwise *it is domination in sharp contrast to Christ's teaching* as explained above. The invariable rule followed in the early Church was very different from that of today (see no 10.3.2. of this article). Again, to judge anyone

21. Gregory VII in R.W. Southern, 1970, p. 102 – as quoted in *Jeevadhara* 124, pp. 265-66.

22. *Jeevadhara* 101, pp. 411-12.

23. *Jeevadhara* 124, pp. 261-2.

according to laws made at Rome's own sweet will is even *greater domination* and to punish anyone accordingly is the *greatest domination*, all of which could or should be strongly protested. Here it is that the right of conscience should be applied and the right also to disobey *filialiter et obedienter*.²⁴ Submission to such domination, on the contrary, would only quicken the process of corruption of authority. Again insisting on one catechism for the universal Church is nothing but *cultural domination*. All domination is abuse of authority. Even in the secular sphere equality, fraternity and freedom which are gospel values are recognised all over the world.

10.3.6. A 'mystique' has come to surround the authority of the Church, especially of the Pope. But the Church is not helpless. The following words of Yves Congar would be reassuring and encouraging to all whether conservatives or progressives: "The Church is wholly responsible for the idea that her hierarchical ministers have of the nature of their authority and for the way in which they exercise it. If they are treated as potentates they will become potentates. If they are deferred to with servility it will be too easy for them to let their lives be ruined by the spirit of domination, which is very tenacious of life in the heathen that still survives in each one of us."²⁵

B (a) Re-Reading the Bible and

(b) Re-Thinking Dogmas

11. In the light of what has been said about God and the Kingdom with its essential requisite of loving service, the Church has to re-read the Bible and re-think all dogmas and doctrines, not to speak of theologies, catechisms, creeds, ritual etc.

11.1. This does not at all imply their denial or relativization. Still all imperial and feudal power-structures will undoubtedly be up in arms over any such attempts. Papal Curia's stiff resistance after Pope John's announcement of Vatican Council II as said above is a case in point.²⁶ Every authority that is corrupt is mortally afraid of any radical change that will threaten their existence as such. Yet the Church has to stand its ground despite resistance from any quarter whatsoever and see that its authority conform to the Gospel principles. There has been an implicit fear that the foundations of the Church would be shaken

24. As quoted by Yves Congar, *ibid.* p. 64.

25. *ibid.* p. 95.

26. cf. Xavier Rynne, *ibid.* p. 251.

whenever a question of rethinking any of its ancient teaching, especially defined dogmas, was proposed. This is an unfounded fear, a misconception. If the Church is founded on truth and universal love it will endure forever.

11.2. There is yet another misconception that God has spoken once and for all. No creature, neither Paul nor Peter can set any limit to God's speech. God speaks, what to us seems, yesterday and today and tomorrow. The misconception makes people deaf to what God speaks to them here and now, say, through signs of the times (see no 5.3.1.)

11.3. There is still a third misconception that the Church has the fullness of truth and that we know everything that we need to know. The history of the Church and of the development of doctrine gives the lie to it. Vatican II's open confession and its abandoning of a series of monopolies as stated above would dispel such misconception forever. Such misconceptions were the cause of much triumphalism and domination which had been holding sway for sometime long in the Church. We all need to be humble before God and fully conscious of our limitations.

(a) Re-Reading the Bible

12.1. Bible is the word of God, but in the words of humans with all the limitations of their understanding, presuppositions, life-situations and biases; also with the limitations of language, culture and context. Divine revelation is received in the limited minds of humans. When they try to express it, words contract rather than expand. This is all the more true, when it passes from the primary religious language to a secondary one. It can very well be observed when it passes from seers to hearers—from the active participants of divine revelation to its secondary witnesses. In the primary stage the language is paradoxical, figurative, imaginative, symbolic; in the secondary stage the language becomes technical, systematic, defensive and stereotyped as can be seen in dogmas, doctrines, theologies, catechisms etc.²⁷ In the Bible we have both. Any way, no human constructs can be identified with God's self-revelation. To attribute any human language to God would be no other than blasphemy.

27 cf. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. JAK, MC, DAL, Michael Glazier, 1989, pp. 564-5.

12.2. Bible scholars are agreed that inspiration does not guarantee historicity of every thing said in the Bible and does not rule out fiction, myths, moral stories, parables, folklore etc. in the Bible. The first chapters of Genesis, for example, are pre-historical and form a universal setting or preface to the history of the Patriarchs - the early history of a particular people called Israelites. It is a beautiful mythical story of creation, 'derived from Mesopotamia's canonical version of cosmic origins in the so called babylonian Creation Epic called "*Emma elis*" and Gilgamesh Epic'²⁸. The Genesis story is a critical version of the above Mesopotamian myth, substituting monotheism for polytheism of Mesopotamians and expressing the Hebrew people's faith in the one God who is the creator and universal Lord and explaining in a plausible way the presence of evil in the world. The world described here is a two-tiered (or three-tiered) stationary world with the heaven(s) above and the earth below (and the hell beneath). Paul or any other writer or compiler of either the Old or the New Testament book, or even Jesus cannot be credited with the immense knowledge of today opened up by modern sciences according to which the origin of the universe dates back to billions of years and the appearance of humans on earth as *homo habilis* and *homo erectus* and *homo sapiens* in several parts of the earth dates back to a hundred thousand years or less, but any way prehistory. No matter. The creation story in *Genesis* need not at all be in conflict with the findings of modern science provided it is taken as such – a creation myth.

12.3. Take another example say from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Raymond E. Brown, one of the foremost Bible scholars of today, in his *The Birth of the Messiah* (Doubleday, 1993, p. 36) says of the infancy narratives in the first two chapters of the above gospels: "Indeed, a close analysis of the infancy narratives makes it unlikely that either account is completely historical." This seems to be the least common denominator of all infancy narratives. But they all have their place in the theologies of the evangelists. We know today that gospels are not strictly as many biographies of Jesus. Once we take all that they contain as historical truths we cross the limit and then we are not on safe ground.

(b) Rethinking Dogmas and Doctrines

13.1. What is said about Scripture is much more applicable to Dogmas and Doctrines, not to speak of theologies, catechisms etc.

28 [ANET, pp. 60-62. (ib. p. 75), as quoted in *Genesis* by E.A. Speiser, pp. 9-10]

The God we believe is shrouded in mystery. God cannot be expressed in human language or be understood by human minds. It would be unpardonably presumptuous of humans to try to define God in propositional statements or in philosophical terms or in mathematical formulas like nature and person, substance and accidents, one and three, one and two etc. Again the history of the formation and development of dogmas and doctrines shows that it was not always for clarifying the truth of God but for combating heretical trends and contrary views (as appeared to the Church leaders of that time) and that it often lacked checks and balances which led to giving one-sided emphases to one or other aspects. So there is ample reason for us to reopen the debates and re-think every dogma, doctrine and/or creedal formula.

13.2. Vatican II has set an example to be followed by all those who love the truth. The Council refused to characterise any of its pronouncements as "infallible statements". This acknowledgement of the limitations of its knowledge is a healthy sign that the Church is turning more and more from triumphalism and dogmatism of the past to a more plausible explanation of its message in terms intelligible to the humanity of today.

V. Kenosis: Radical Transformation of the Church

14.1 The Church has to undergo a real *Kenosis* – a radical transformation in order to be of effective service to the Kingdom of God, failing which it has no reason for or justification of its existence.

14.2. Ecclesial reform is not that of a few individuals nor, does it consist in making merely confessions of past guilt. It means reform of the Church as such in its corporate aspect. Jesus evinced a predilection for corporate response to his gospel. Even the smallest community of two or three has his promise of presence and his blessings (Mt 18:20). It shows how much he loves a prayerful community of loving service. Fraternal correction, if need be, has to be finally submitted to the decision of the community of brothers and sisters and not to the discretion of the office-bearers. (ibid. 18:17). The community of disciples is given the same work of 'binding and loosing' as given to Peter (ibid. 18:18). Misunderstanding of this passage has caused a lot of abuse of authority in the Church. It is the Church on earth that is carrying out heaven's decisions communicated to it by the spirit and not heaven that ratifies the Church's decisions.²⁹

29. cf. *Matthew*, ed. By W.E. Albright and C.S. Mann, Doubleday, 1973, p. 279.

14.3. Considering the supreme importance Jesus gave to corporate response to the gospel, his teachings such as resisting the temptation to the spirit of possession and power, casting aside all pomp and splendour, waging war against the flesh, forgiving enemies, turning the other cheek etc. (Lk 4:2-12; Mt 5: 1-12; 20-48), have to be applied to the Church as communion. The application and regular practices should begin from top to bottom (as it has come about in the Church today), if it has to take effect.

14.4. In such a practice Jesus' preferences should be strictly followed. Jesus' first preference undoubtedly is loving service. Those at the top as at present should become servants and slaves of others – and it is *not an option but a must*: here lies the secret of *Kenosis*; here also lies the failure of all Church reforms. The Church should return to *Jesus Christ's ordination*: those who want to be *first* among you must be your *slave*: being slave - washing the feet of others is the preparation for and practice of Jesus' ordination as is clear from his words. Church ordination has most often been turning somersault. *Kenosis* is absolutely necessary here unless we want the bane and curse of the Church to continue, I mean, the imperial and feudal power structures. No amount of confessions can atone for any guilt as long as the structures of domination are here to stay. To serve as Jesus did at the Last Supper cannot be caught up by an act as on Maundy Thursday where people with their feet already washed and cleansed are presented for the ceremony, thus making a mockery of the sacred act. This is the example par excellence of development of certain traditions in the Church which afterwards would be used as props to certain stands taken by the powers that be. Why, even the present imperial and feudal power-structures seem to be explained away as a longstanding Church tradition, though it is explicitly against and diametrically opposed to Jesus' teaching, as we have explained above. What Jesus wants is loving service, that springs consistently from the heart perfectly attuned to the gospel, making it one, with the last and the least of humanity.

14.4.1. Apart from all 'mystique', once papal primacy sheds all earthly power and splendour which are vestiges of Constantine's largesse and of subsequent acquisition and once purified of all domination strictly forbidden by Jesus, what will it look like?- *The*

servant of the servants in its naked beauty wherein Christ's ordination shines in all its glory. In the same case, how will bishops and clergy look like? - *the last and the least* among all the faithful: that is returning to the ordination of Jesus Christ.

14.4.2. Here a serious but an interesting question arises: if those who want to be the *first* and the *great* in the Church should first be *servants* and *slaves of all others* who will have the last word in the Church?³⁰ The present writer in his paper presented at the first Dialogue between bishops and theologians in India in 1976 raised this question and the answer was obvious. But the question would mellow down today if the Church transforms itself to a communion or communion of communions—a family of brothers and sisters. Refer to the invariable rule followed by the early Church.³¹

14.5. Then take the case of infallibility there is unanimous agreement in the Church among theologians that infallibility is neither new revelation nor inspiration. If so, then, apart from any 'mystique' it is explication of the *sensus fidelium* or *sensus ecclesiae*. Vatican II, by its refusal to characterise any of its statements as infallible and by its declaration that the Church has a progressive understanding of its traditions and doctrines has, as Xavier Rynne has put it, "downgraded" as it were the doctrine of infallibility, not of course in any derogatory sense.

VI. Conclusion

Consequences of Kenosis: Renewed Self-understanding of the Church

15. On March 12, 2000 Pope John Paul II during the solemn celebration of the Eucharist at St. Peter's Basilica made a historic act of confession of all past sins by Christians and asked pardon of God and the world for all their wrongs. Vatican II had already confessed its share of guilt in causing and perpetuating disunity among its believers and committed itself to continual reformation. We cannot but believe in the sincerity and genuineness of the confessions. May we hope that a real Kenosis is setting in despite the retreat from Vatican II about which we have spoken above. But one thing is sure: no amount

30. cf. my article in Jeevadhara 58. P. 290

31 no. 10.3.2. of this article.

of confessions will be of any avail if it does not follow radical conversion of the Church's present power-structures of domination. We know, however, such conversion of a world-wide Church of 2000 years with its long standing, deep-rooted and widely over-lapping power structures cannot be brought about overnight. It requires intensive and prayerful thought, study and reflection and prolonged discussions, deliberations and decisions at a full General Council as said above. But the Pope can certainly set the pace, as the present imperial and feudal power structure is based on him as the head of the Episcopal college of the Church.

15.1. Once the Kenosis starts off the Roman Curia becomes superfluous and its place, if need be, will be completely filled in by the Synod of Bishops.

15.2. As Kenosis proceeds the Church will consider if it can shake off the State. Power and wealth go together and it has diminished not a little the credibility of the Church. People surrounded by slavish men (and women) and earthly splendour have most often ruined themselves by the spirit of domination.

15.3. There would hardly be any need any more of diplomatic relations with the Holy See and apostolic nunciatures (said to be watch-dogs of Vatican) will cease to exist. If ever there be any need, representatives of Bishops' Conferences of the respective countries can do the job with better expertise and transparency.

15.4. Freed from all earthly trammels such as power and pomp, domination, self-will and prejudices, the Church will be open to all questions that have already been

shelved and fully receptive to the new stirrings of the spirit and to the fresh light of truth. A few examples may be given below.

15.4.1. Any one who is open to what has been going on in the world cannot be blind to the equality that women have attained with men in all respects and to their efficiency of performance, besides their theological and spiritual insights. It was very unprecedented that Jesus, at a time when women were considered chattels and talking with them in public was taboo, welcomed their services and had them accompany him in his itineraries. No theologian or biblical scholar could as yet produce any valid argument against ordination of women.

Tradition is no argument against it. Vatican II abandoned many claims that the Church had been traditionally holding for centuries. The Council explicitly says that the Church continually brings forth new things from its searches into its traditions and doctrines. To make any discrimination against them would be against Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God where all humans are equal - a family of brothers and sisters.

15.4.2. Liturgical celebration is conceived as the public prayer of the Church. But ultimately it is 'adoration of the Father in spirit and truth' by His children assembled here and now. There would be hundreds of thousands of such communions throughout the world, but none will be the same. As the public prayer of the Church there could be a common text for all, but each communion has its own texture and context, the conception and expression of the text by each communion in its own language and culture which will be different from different communions while none from out side would meddle in it without irreverence to God and interference with the freedom of the communions. As they grow even the text could be changed according as each conceive God as seated high up in heaven or as present in the cave of their hearts and as the ground of their being and as the life of their lives. The Church will be a communion of such communions with none of them dictating to or controlling another. They will be steadfast in the memory of Jesus and responsible to one another and united in love and service.

15.4.3. As the Kenosis of papal primacy progresses appointment of bishops and clergy according to Christ ordination will be left to the responsibility of the local communion as was the custom in the early Church.

15.4.4. As the Kenosis progresses especially as regards papal infallibility, and the Church becomes more humble, re-thinking on "Canonization" will follow. Much human consideration enters into it and unnecessary and enormous waste of money is involved, both of which may be avoided; Church would be wary of the inscrutable judgement of God.

15.4.5. Hereafter the Church which is a communion of communions will pay greater attention to Orthopraxis than to Orthodoxy, each communion trying to excel oneself in order to restore the credibility

that has been lost. The core of all its evangelization will be Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God with its indispensable requisite of loving service that God is the loving Parent of all humans who are therefore brothers and sisters to one another whether they belong to any religion or no religion.

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15.4.4 As the Kenosis progresses especially as regards papal infallibility and the Church becomes more humble, its thinking on "Canonization" will follow. Much human consideration enters into it and unnecessary and enormous waste of money is involved, both of which may be avoided. Church would be wary of the idolatry of judgement of God.

15.4.5 Hereafter the Church which is a communion of communions will pay greater attention to Orthodoxy than to Orthodoxy, each communion trying to excel oneself in order to restore the unity of the Church.

